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FROM BAPAUME TO PASSCHENDAELE

1917

BY

PHILIP GIBBS

AUTHOR OF

"THE BATTLES OF THE SOMME," "THE SOUL OF THE WAR," ETC.

WITH MAPS

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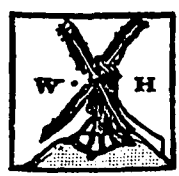

LONDON

WILLIAM HEINEMANN

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FROM BAPAUME TO PASSCHENDAELE

INTRODUCTION

1917. . . . I suppose that a century hence men and women will think of that date as one of the world's black years flinging its shadow forward to the future until gradually new generations escape from its dark spell. To us now, only a few months away from that year, above all to those of us who have seen something of the fighting which crowded every month of it except the last, the colour of 1917 is not black but red, because a river of blood flowed through its changing seasons and there was a great carnage of men. It was a year of unending battle on the Western Front, which matters most to us because of all our youth there. It was a year of monstrous and desperate conflict. Looking back upon it, remembering all its days of attack and counter-attack, all the roads of war crowded with troops and transport, all the battlefields upon which our armies moved under fire, the coming back of the prisoners by hundreds and thousands, the long trails of the wounded, the activity, the traffic, the roar and welter and fury of the year, one has a curious physical sensation of breathlessness and heart-beat because of the burden of so many memories. The heroism of men, the suffering of individuals, their personal adventures, their deaths or escape from death, are swallowed up in this wild drama of battle so that at times it seems impersonal and inhuman like some cosmic struggle in which man is but an atom of the world's convulsion. To me, and perhaps to others like me, who look on at all this from the outside edge of it, going into its fire and fury at times only to look again, closer, into the heart of it, staring at its scenes not as men who belong to them but as witnesses to give evidence at the bar of history—for if we are not that we are nothing—and to chronicle the things that have happened on those fields, this sense of impersonal forces is strong. We see all this in

the mass. We see its movement as a tide watched from the bank and not from the point of view of a swimmer breasting each wave or going down in it. Regimental officers and men know more of the ground in which they live for a while before they go forward over the shell-craters to some barren slope where machine-guns are hidden below the clods of soil, or a line of concrete blockhouses heaped up with timber and sand-bags on one of the ridges. They know with a particular intimacy the smallest landmarks there—the forked branch among some riven trees that are called a " wood," a dead body that lies outside their wire, the muzzle of a broken gun that pokes out of the slime, a hummock of earth that is a German strong point. They know the stench of these places. They know the filth of them, in their dug-outs and in their trenches, in their senses and in their souls. I and a few others have a view less intimate, and on a wider scale. We go to see how our men live in these places, but do not stay with them. We go from one battle to another as doctors from one case to another, feeling the pulse of it, watching its symptoms, diagnosing the prospects of life or death, recording its history, as observers and not as the patients of war, though we take a few of its risks, and its tragedy darkens our spirit sometimes, and the sight of all this struggle of men, the thought of all this slaughter and sacrifice of youth, becomes at times intolerable and agonizing. This broad view of war is almost as wearing to the spirit, though without the physical strain, as the closer view which soldiers have. The wounded man who comes down to the dressing-station after his fight sees only the men around him at the time, and it is a personal adventure of pain limited to his own suffering, and relieved by the joy of his escape. But we see the many wounded who stream down month after month from the battlefields—for three and a half years I have watched the tide of wounded flowing back, so many blind men, so many cripples, so many gassed and stricken men—and there is something staggering in the actual sight of the vastness and the unceasing drift of this wreckage of war. So we have seen the fighting in the year 1917 in the whole sweep of its bloody pageant; and the rapidity with which one battle followed another after an April day in Arras, the continued fury of gun-fire and infantry assaults, and the long heroic effort of our men to smash the enemy's strength before the

year should end, left us, as chroniclers of this twelve months' strife, overwhelmed by the number of its historic episodes and by its human sacrifice.

The year began with the German retreat from the Somme battlefields. It was a withdrawal for strategical reasons—the shortening of the enemy's line and the saving of his man-power—but also a retreat because it was forced upon the enemy by the greatness of his losses in the Somme fighting. He would not have left the Bapaume Ridge and all his elaborate defences down to Péronne and Roye unless we had so smashed his divisions by incessant gun-fire and infantry assaults that he was bound to economize his power for adventures elsewhere. On the ground from which he drew back, more hurriedly than he desired because we followed quickly on his heels to Bapaume, he left some of his dead. Many of his dead. Below Loupart Wood I saw hundreds of them, strewn about their broken batteries, and lying in heaps of obscene flesh in the wild chaos of earth which had been their trenches. On one plot of earth a few hundred yards in length there were 800 dead, and over all this battlefield one had to pick one's way to avoid treading on the bits and bodies of men. From the mud, arms stretched out like those of men who had been drowned in bogs. Boots and legs were uncovered in the muck-heaps, and faces with eyeless sockets on which flies settled, clay-coloured faces with broken jaws, or without noses or scalps, stared up at the sky or lay half buried in the mud. I fell once and clutched a bit of earth and found that I had grasped a German hand. It belonged to a body in field-grey stuck into the side of a bank on the edge of all this filthy shambles. . . . In the retreat the enemy laid waste the country behind him. I have described in this book the completeness of that destruction and its uncanny effect upon our senses as we travelled over the old No Man's Land through hedges of barbed wire and across the enemy's trenches into his abandoned strongholds like Gommecourt and Serre, and then into open country where German troops had lived beyond our gun-fire in French villages still inhabited by civilians. It was like wandering through a plague-stricken land abandoned after some fiendish orgy, of men drunk with the spirit of destruction. Every cottage in villages for miles around had been gutted by explosion. Every church in those villages had been blown up. The orchards

had been cut down and some of the graves ransacked for their lead. There had been no mercy for historic little towns like Bapaume and Péronne, and in Bapaume the one building that stood when we entered—the square tower of the Town Hall—was hurled up a week later when a slow fuse burnt to its end, and only a hole in the ground shows where it had been. The enemy left these slow-working fuses in many places, and "booby-traps" to blow a man to bits or blind him for life if he touched a harmless-looking stick or opened the lid of a box, or stumbled over an old boot. One of the dirty tricks of war.

We followed the enemy quickly to Bapaume northwards towards Quéant, but with only small patrols farther east, where he retired in easy stages with rear-guards of machine-gunners to his Hindenburg line behind St. Quentin. The absence of large numbers of British soldiers in this abandoned country scared one. Supposing the enemy were to come back in force? It was difficult to know his whereabouts. We were afraid of running our cars into his outposts. "Can you tell me where our front line is," asked a friend of mine to a sergeant leaning against a ruined wall and chatting to a private who stood next to him. The sergeant removed his cigarette from his mouth and with just the glint of a smile in his eyes said, "Well, sir, I am the front line." It was almost like that for a week or two. I went down roads where there was no sign of a trench or a patrol and knew that the enemy was very close. One felt lonely. Sir Douglas Haig did not waste his men in a futile pursuit of the enemy. He wanted them elsewhere, and decided that the Germans would not return over the roads they had destroyed by mine-craters to the villages they had laid waste. He was concentrating masses of men round Arras for the battles which had been planned in the autumn of '16.

The Commander-in-Chief has explained in one of his dispatches how the general plan of campaign for the spring offensive was modified because of the German retreat which relieved us of another battle of the Ancre. It was readjusted also, as he has written, in order to meet the wishes of the French Command, so that the attack on the Messines Ridge, to be followed by operations against the Flanders ridges towards the coast, had to be made secondary to the actions around Arras and the Scarpe. They were intended to hold a number of German divisions while the French undertook their own great

offensive in the Champagne under the supreme command of General Nivelle. In the Arras battles our troops were to do the "team work" for the French, and if the combined operations did not produce decisive results the British Armies might then be transferred to Flanders, according to the original plan. It was a handicap to our own strategical ideas, and was certain to weaken our divisions without increasing our prestige before they could be sent to Flanders for the most important assaults on our length of front. In loyalty to our Allies it was decided to subordinate our own plan to theirs, and this agreement was carried out utterly. By bad luck the Italians were not ready to strike at the same time, and the Russian revolution had already begun to relieve the enemy of his Eastern menace, so that the Anglo-French offensive did not have the prospect of decisive victory which might have come if the German armies had been pressed on all fronts.

Our regimental officers and men knew nothing of all this high strategy, nothing of the international difficulties which confronted our High Command. They knew only that they had to attack strong and difficult positions and that the immediate success depended upon their own leadership and the courage and training of their men. They were sure of that and hoped for a victory which would break the German spirit. They devoted themselves to the technical details of their work, and only in subconscious thought pondered over the powers that lie behind the preparations of battle and decide the fate of fighting men. The scenes in Arras and on the roads that lead to Arras are not to be forgotten by men who lived through them. Below ground as well as above ground thousands of soldiers worked night and day for weeks before the hour of attack. Above ground they were getting many guns into position, making roads, laying cables, building huts and camps, hurrying up vast stores of material. Below ground they were boring tunnels and making them habitable for many battalions, with ventilation shafts and electric light. All the city of Arras has an underground system of vaults and passages dug out in the time of the Spanish Netherlands when the houses of the citizens were built of stone quarried from the ground on which they stood. These subterranean passages were deepened and lengthened until they went a mile or more beyond Arras to the edge of the German front lines. The old

vaults where the merchants kept their stores were propped up and cleaned out, and in this underground world thousands of our men lived for several days before the battle waiting for "zero" hour on April 9, when they would come up into the light and see the shell-fire which was now exploding above them, unloosing boulders of chalky rock about them and shaking the bowels of the earth. The enemy knew of our preparations and of this life in Arras, and during the week before the battle he flung many shells into the city, smashing houses already stricken, "strafing" the station and the barracks, the squares and courtyards, and the roads that led in and out. During the progress of the battle I went many times into the broken heart of Arras while the bodies of men and horses lay about where transport columns had gone galloping by under fire and while the shrill whine of high velocities was followed by the crash of shells among the ruins. In the town and below it there were always crowds of men during the weeks of fighting outside. I went through the tunnels when long columns of soldiers in single file moved slowly forward to another day's battle in the fields beyond, and when another column came back, wounded and bloody after their morning's fight.

The wounded and the unwounded passed each other in these dimly lighted corridors. Their steel hats clinked together. Their bodies touched. Wafts of stale air laden with a sickly stench came out of the vaults. Faint whiffs of poison-gas filtered through the soil above and made men vomit. For the most time the men were silent as they passed each other, but now and then a wounded man would say, "Oh, Christ!" or "Mind my arm, mate," and an unwounded man would pass some remark to the man ahead. In vaults dug into the sides of the passages were groups of tunnellers and other men half screened by blanket curtains. Their rifles were propped against the quarried rocks. They sat on ammunition boxes and played cards to the light of candles stuck in bottles, which made their shadows flicker fantastically on the walls. They took no interest in the procession beyond their blankets—the walking wounded and the troops going up. Some of them slept on the stone floors with their heads covered by their overcoats and made pillows of their gas-masks. Under some old houses of Arras were women and children—about 700

of them—among our soldiers. They were the people who had lived underground since the beginning of the war and would not leave. Only four of them went away when they were told of the coming battle and its dangers. "We will stay," they said with a certain pride because they had seen so much war. A few women were wounded and one or two killed. Later, after the first day's battle, in spite of some high velocities from long-range guns, the streets and squares were filled with soldiers, and Arras was tumultuous with the movement of men and horses and mules and wagons. The streets seethed with Scottish soldiers muddy as they came straight out of battle, bloody as they walked in wounded. Many battalions of Jocks came into the squares, and their pipers came to play to them. I watched the Gordons' pipers march up and down in stately ritual, and their colonel, who stood next to me, looked at them with a proud light in his eyes as the tune of "Highland Laddie" swelled up to the gables and filled the open frontages of the gutted houses. Snowflakes fell lightly on the steel hats of the Scots in the square, and mud was splashed to the khaki aprons over their kilts—no browner than their hard lean faces—as a battery rumbled across the cobbled place and the drivers turned in their saddles to grin at the fine swagger of the pipers and the triumph of the big drumsticks. An old woman danced a jig to the pipes, holding her skirt above her skinny legs. She tripped up to a group of Scottish officers and spoke quick shrill words to them. "What does the old witch say," asked a laughing Gordon. She had something particular to say. In 1870 she had heard the pipes in Arras. They were played by prisoners from South Germany, and as a young girl she had danced to them. . . . There was a casualty clearing-station in Arras, in a deep high vault like the crypt of a cathedral. The way into it was down a long tunnelled passage, and during the battle thousands of men came here to have their wounds dressed. They formed up in queues waiting their turn and moved slowly down the tunnelled way, weary, silent, patient. Outside lay some of the bad cases until the stretcher-bearers carried them down, and others sat on the side of the road or lay at full length there, dog-weary after their long walk from the battlefields. Blind boys were led forward by their comrades, and men with all their heads and faces swathed about. They were not out of danger even yet, for the enemy hated to

leave Arras as a health resort, but it was sanctuary for men who had been in hell fire up by Monchy.

The first day of the Arras battle was our victory. We struck the enemy a heavy blow, and the capture of the Vimy Ridge by the Canadians and the Highland Division was as wonderful as the great thrust by English and Scottish battalions along the valley of the Scarpe across the Arras—Cambrai road. By April 14 we had captured 13,000 prisoners and over 200 guns. But it was hard fighting after the first few hours of the 9th, and the operations that followed on both sides of the Scarpe were costly to us. The London men of the 56th Division, and the old county troops of the 3rd and 12th and 37th, and the Scots of the 15th suffered in heroic fighting against strong and fresh reserves of the enemy who were massed rapidly to check them and made fierce, repeated counter-attacks against the village of Rœux and its chemical works, north of the Scarpe, and against Monchy-le-Preux and Guémappe, south of the river. Again and again these counter-attacks were beaten back with most bloody losses to the enemy, but our own men suffered each time until they were weary beyond words. I saw the cavalry ride forward towards Monchy, where they came under great fire, and I saw the body of their General carried back to Tilloy. It was a day of tragic memory.

At this time, as Sir Douglas Haig has recorded, the battle of Arras might have ended. But the French offensive was about to begin, and it was important that the full pressure of the British attacks should be maintained in order to assist our Allies. A renewal of the assault was therefore ordered, and after a week's postponement to gather together new supplies, to change the divisions, and complete the artillery dispositions, fighting was resumed on a big scale on April 23. It was on a front of about nine miles, from Croisilles to Gavrelle. Important ground was taken west of Chérisy and east of Monchy, where our troops seized Infantry Hill, but the violent counter-attacks of the enemy in great strength prevented the gain of all our objectives on that day, and once more put our troops to a severe ordeal. Rœux and Gavrelle on the north of the Scarpe, Guémappe on the south, were the focal points of this struggle and the scene of the bitterest fighting in and out of the villages. On April 23 and 24 the enemy made eight separate counter-attacks against Gavrelle, and each was shattered by our

artillery and machine-gun fire. On April 28 there was another great day of battle when the Canadians had fierce hand-to-hand fighting in the village of Arleux, and English troops made progress towards Oppy over Greenland Hill and beyond Monchy. Gavrelle was attacked seven times more by the enemy, who fell again in large numbers. The night attack of May 3 was unlucky in many of its episodes because some of our men lost their way in the darkness and had the enemy behind them as well as in front of them, and suffered under heavy artillery and machine-gun fire. It was "team work" for the French, and many of our sons fell that day not knowing that their blood was the price of loyalty to our Allies and part payment of the debt we owe to France for all her valour in this war. On May 8 the battle front was extended on a line of sixteen miles, and while the 3rd and 1st Armies attacked from Fontaine-lez-Croisilles to Fresnoy, the 5th Army stormed the Hindenburg line near Bullecourt. The Australians carried a stretch of this Hindenburg line. Chérisy fell into the hands of East county battalions, Rœux was entered again by English troops, and in Fresnoy, north of Oppy, the Canadians fought masses of Germans assembled for counter-attack and swept them out of the village. Heavy counter-attacks developed later, so that our men had to fall back from Chérisy and Rœux—Fresnoy was abandoned later—but the rest of the ground was held. During this month's fighting twenty-three German divisions had been withdrawn exhausted from the line, and we had captured 19,500 prisoners, 257 guns including 98 heavies, 464 machine-guns, 227 trench mortars, and a great quantity of war material. We advanced our line five miles on a front of over twenty miles, including the Vimy Ridge, which had always menaced our positions. Above all, we had drawn upon the enemy's strength so that the French armies were relieved of that amount of resistance to their offensive against the Chemin des Dames. That was the idea behind it all, and it succeeded, though the cost was not light. The battle of Arras petered out into small engagements and nagging fighting when on June 7 the battle of Messines began.

It was a model battle, and the whole operation was astonishing in the thoroughness of its preparations through every detail of organization, in the training of its method of attack, in generalship and staff work, and in its Intelligence department.

The 2nd Army had long held this part of the Ypres salient, and knew the enemy's country as well as its own. The observers on Kemmel Hill, which looked across to Wytschaete Ridge, had watched every movement in the enemy's lines, and every sign of new defensive work. Aeroplane photographs, stacks of them, revealed many secrets of the enemy's life on this high ground which gave him observation of all our roads and villages in the flat country between Dickebusch and Ypres. A relief map on a big scale was built up in a field behind our lines, and the assault troops and their officers walked round it and studied in miniature the woods and slopes, strong points and trenches, which they would have to attack. For eighteen months past Australian and Canadian miners had been at work below ground boring deep under the enemy's positions and laying charges for the explosion of twenty-four mines. All that time the enemy, aware of his danger, had been counter-mining, and at Hill 60 there was constant underground fighting for more than ten months when men met each other in the converging galleries and fought in their darkness. As Sir Douglas Haig has written, at the time of our offensive the enemy was known to be driving a gallery which would have broken into the tunnel leading into the Hill 60 mines. By careful listening it was judged that if our attack took place on the date arranged, the enemy's gallery would just fail to reach us. So he was allowed to proceed. Eight thousand yards of gallery had been bored, and there were nineteen mines ready charged with over a million pounds of explosives. I saw those nineteen mines go up. The earth rocked with a great shudder, and the sky was filled with flame. It was the signal of our bombardment to break out in a deafening tumult of guns after a quietude in which I heard only the snarl of enemy gas-shells and the shunting and whistling of our railway engines down below there in the darkness as though this battlefield were Clapham Junction. Round about the salient a network of railways had been built with great speed under the very eyes of the enemy, and though he had shelled our tracks and engines he could never stop the work of those engineers who laboured with fine courage and industry so that the guns might not lack for shells nor the men for supplies on the day of attack. The battle of Wytschaete and Messines was a fine victory for us, breaking the evil spell of the Ypres salient in which our

men had sat down so long under direct observation of the enemy on that ridge above them. Kemmel Hill, which had been under fire in our lines for three years, became a health resort for Australian boys whose turn to fight had not yet come, and they sat on top of the old observation-post where men had hidden below ground to watch through a slit in the earth, staring through field-glasses at the sweep of fire from Oostaverne to Pilkem, and eating sweets, and putting wild flowers in their slouch hats. Dickebusch lost its horror. The road to Vierstraat was no longer bracketed by German shells, and there was no further need of camouflage screens along other roads where notice-boards said: *Drive slowly—dust draws fire.* On the morning of battle after the capture of the ridge an Irish brigadier sat outside his dug-out on a kitchen chair before a deal table, where his maps were spread. "It's good to take the fresh air," he said. "Yesterday I had to keep below ground." All that made a difference on the right of the salient, but Ypres was still "a hot shop," as the men say, and the roads out of Ypres—the Lille road and the Menin road—were as abominable as ever, and worse than ever when at the end of July the battles of Flanders began.

The Wytschaete—Messines Ridge is the eastern spur of that long range of "abrupt isolated hills," to use the words of Sir Douglas Haig, which divides the valleys of the Lys and the Yser, and links up with the ridges stretching north-eastwards to the Ypres—Menin road, and then northwards to Passchendaele and Staden. One of the objects of our campaign in 1917 was to gain the high ground to Passchendaele and beyond. A mere glance at a relief map is enough to show the formidable nature of the positions held by the enemy on those slopes which dominated our low ground. When one went across the Yser Canal along the Menin road, or towards the Pilkem Ridge, those slopes seemed like a wall of cliffs barring the way of our armies, however strongly our tide of men might dash against them. The plan to take them by assault needed enormous courage and high faith in the mind of any man who bore the burden of command, and his faith and courage depended utterly on the valour of the men who were to carry out his plan against those frowning hills. The men did not fail our High Command, and for three and a half months those troops of ours fought with a heroic resolution never surpassed by any

soldiers in the world, and hardly equalled, perhaps, in all the history of war, against terrible gun-fire and innumerable machine-guns, in storms and swamps, in bodily misery because of the mud and wet, in mental suffering because of the long strain on their nerve and strength, with severe casualties because of the enemy's fierce resistance, but with such passionate and self-sacrificing courage that the greatest obstacles were overcome, and the enemy was beaten back from one line of defence to another with large captures of prisoners and guns until, in the middle of November, the crest of Passchendaele was gained.

Before the first day of the battle the 5th Army, with the 1st French Army on its left, below the flooded ground of St.-Jansbeck, crossed the Yser Canal and seized 3000 yards of the enemy's trench system. During that night the pioneer battalion of the Guards, working under fierce fire, built seventeen bridges across the canal for the passage of our troops on the day of assault. On that day, July 31, at 3.50 in the morning, battle was engaged on a front of fifteen miles from Boesinghe to the River Lys, where the 2nd Army was making a holding attack on our right wing. The German front-line system of defence was taken everywhere. Our troops captured the Pilkem Ridge on the left, Velorenhoek, the Frezenberg Redoubt, the Pommern Redoubt, and St.-Julien north of the Ypres—Roulers railway, and were fighting forward against fierce resistance on both sides of the Ypres—Menin road. They stormed through Sanctuary Wood and captured Stirling Castle, Hooge, and the Bellewaerde Ridge, and by the end of the day had gained the crest of Westhoek Ridge. On the 2nd Army front the New-Zealanders carried the village of La Basseville after close fighting, which lasted fifty minutes, and English troops on their left captured Hollebeke and difficult ground north of the Ypres—Comines Canal. Over 6000 prisoners, including 133 officers, surrendered to us that day.

It was in the afternoon of the first day that the luck of the weather was decided against us and there began those heavy rain-storms which drenched the battlefields in August and made them dreadful for men and beasts. All this part of Flanders is intersected by small streams or "beeks," filtering through the valleys between the ridges, and our artillery-fire had already caused them to form ponds and swamps by

destroying their channels so that they slopped over the low-lying ground. The rains enlarged this area of flood, and so saturated the clayey soil that it became a vast bog with deep overbrimming pits where thousands of shell-craters had pierced the earth. Tracks made of wooden slabs fastened together were the only roads by which men and pack-mules could cross this quagmire, and each of these ways became taped out by the enemy's artillery, and very perilous. They were slippery under moist mud, and men and mules fell into the bogs on either side, and sometimes drowned in them. At night in the darkness and the storms it was hard to find the tracks and difficult to keep to them, and long columns of troops staggered and stumbled forward with mud up to their knees if they lost direction, and mud up to their necks if they fell into the shell-holes. It was over such ground as this, in such intolerable conditions, that our men fought and won their way across the chain of ridges which led to Passchendaele. I saw some of the haunting scenes of this struggle and went over the ground across the Pilkem Ridge, and along the Ypres—Menin road to Westhoek Ridge, and up past Hooge to the bogs of Glencorse Wood and Inverness Copse, and beyond the Yser Canal to St.-Jean and Wieltje, where every day for months our gunners went on firing, and every day the enemy "answered back" with scattered and destructive fire, searching for our batteries and for the bodies of our men. The broken skeleton of Ypres was always in the foreground or the background of this scene of war, and every day it changed in different atmospheric phases and different hours of light so that it was never the same in its tragic beauty. Sometimes it was filled with gloom and shadows, and the tattered masonry of the Cloth Hall, lopped off at the top, stood black as granite above its desolate boulder-strewn square. Sometimes when storm-clouds were blown wildly across the sky and the sunlight struck through them, Ypres would be all white and glamorous, like a ghost city in a vision of the world's end. At times there was a warm glow upon its rain-washed walls, and they shone like burnished metal. Or they were wrapped about with a thick mist stabbed through by flashes of red fire from heavy guns, revealing in a moment's glare the sharp edges of the fallen stonework, the red ruins of the prison and asylum, the huddle of shell-pierced roofs, and that broken tower which stands as a memorial of

what once was the splendour of Ypres. A military policeman standing outside the city gave an order to all going in: "Gas-masks and steel hats to be worn," and at that moment when one fumbled at the string of one's gas-bag and fastened the strap of a steel hat beneath one's chin, the menace of war crept close and the evil of it touched one's senses. It was very evil beyond the Lille gate and the Menin gate, where new shell-holes mingled with old ones, and men walked along the way of death. The spirit of that evil lurked about the banks of the Yser Canal with its long fringe of blasted trees, white and livid, with a leprous look when the sunlight touched their stumps. The water of the canal was but a foul slime stained with gobs of colour. The wreckage of bridges and barges lay in it. In its banks were unexploded shells and deep gashes where the bursts had torn the earth down, and innumerable craters. The Yser Canal holds in a ghostly way the horror of this war. Yet it is worse beyond. Out through the Menin gate the view of the salient widens, and every yard of the way is bleeding with the memory of British soldiers who walked and fought and died here since the autumn of '14. How many of them we can hardly guess or know. The white crosses of their graves are scattered about the shell-churned fields and the rubbish-heaps of brick, though many were never buried, and many were taken back by stretcher-bearers who risked their lives to bring in these bodies. There is no house where the White Château used to be. There is no grange by the Moated Grange where men crept out at night, crawling on their stomachs when the flares went up. Hundreds of thousands of men have gone up to Hell-fire Corner, some of them with a cold sweat in the palms of their hands and brave faces and an act of sacrifice in their hearts. It was the way to Hooge. It was a corner of the hell that was here always under German guns and German eyes from the ridge beyond. They had high ground all around us, as the country goes up from Observatory Ridge and Sanctuary Wood and Bellewaerde to the Westhoek Ridge and the high plateau of Polygon Wood. No men of ours could move in the daylight without being seen. The Menin road was always under fire. Every bit of broken barn, every dug-out and trench, was a mark for the enemy's artillery. During the Flanders fighting all this ground was still in the danger zone, though the enemy lost much of his

direct observation after our first advance. But he was still trying to find the old places and hurled over big shells in a wild scattered way. They flung up black fountains of earth with frightful violence. Everywhere there were shell-holes so deep that a cart and horse would find room in them. One looked into these gulfs with beastly sensations—with a kind of animal fear at the thought of what would happen to a man if he stood in the way of such an explosion. There was a sense of old black brooding evil about all this country, and worst of all in remembrance were the mine-craters of Hooge. I stared into those pits all piled with stinking sand-bags on which fungus grew, and thought of friends of mine who once lived here, with the enemy a few yards away from them, with mines and saps creeping close to them before another upheaval of the earth, with corpses and bits of bodies rotting half buried where they sat, always wet, always lousy, in continual danger of death. The mines went up and men fought for new craters over new dead. The sand-bags silted down after rain, and machine-gun bullets swept through the gaps, and men sank deeper into this filth and corruption. The place is abandoned now, but the foulness of it stayed, with a lake of slime in which bodies floated, and the same old stench rose from its caverns and craters. Bellewaerde Lake, to the north of Hooge, is not what it used to be when gentlemen of Ypres came out here to shoot wild-fowl or walk through Château Wood around the White Château of Hooge with a dog and a gun. There are still stumps of trees, shot and mangled by three years of fire, but no more wood than that, and the lake is a cesspool into which the corruption of death has flowed. Its water is stained with patches of red and yellow and green slime, and shapeless things float in it. Beyond is the open ground which goes up to Westhoek Ridge above Nonne Boschen and Glencorse Wood, for which our men fought on the first day of battle and afterwards in many weeks of desperate struggle. The Australians took possession of this country for a time and had to stay and hold it after the excitement of advance. They came winding along the tracks in single file through this newly captured ground, carrying their lengths of duck-board and ammunition boxes with just a grim glance towards places where shells burst with monstrous whoofs. "A hot spot," said one of these boys, crouching with his mates in a bit of battered trench outside a German pill-box

surrounded by dead bodies. Our guns were firing from many batteries, and flights of shells rushed through the air from the heavies a long way back and from the field-guns forward. It was the field-guns which hurt one's ears most with their sharp hammer-strokes. Now and again a little procession passed to which all other men gave way. It was a stretcher-party carrying a wounded man shoulder high. There is something noble and stately about these bearers, and when I see them I always think of Greek heroes carried back on their shields. There was a vapour of poison gas about these fields, not strong enough to kill, but making one's eyes and skin smart. The Australians did not seem to notice it. Perhaps the stench of dead horses overwhelmed their nostrils. It was strong and foul. The carcasses of these poor beasts lay about as they had been hit by shrapnel or shell splinters, and down one track came a living horse less lucky than these, bleeding badly from its wounds and ambling slowly with drooping head and glazed eyes. Worse smells than of dead horse crept up from the battered trenches and dug-outs, where Glencorse Wood goes down to Inverness Copse. It was the dreadful odour of dead men. It rose in gusts and waves and eddies over all this ground, for the battlefield was strewn with dead. I saw many German bodies in the fields of the Somme, and on the way out from Arras, and on the Vimy Ridge, but never in such groups as lay about the pill-boxes and the shell-craters of the salient. Everywhere they lay half buried in the turmoil of earth, or stark above ground without any cover to hide them. They lay with their heads flung back into water-filled craters or with their legs dangling in deep pools. They were blown into shapeless masses of raw flesh by our artillery. Heads and legs and arms all coated in clay lay without bodies far from where the men of whom they had been part were killed. God knows what agonies were suffered before death by men shut up in those German blockhouses, like Fitzclarence Farm, and Herenthage Château, and Clapham Junction, which I passed on the way up. Some of the garrisons had not stayed in the blockhouses until our troops had reached them. Perhaps the concussion of our drum-fire was worse inside those concrete walls than outside. Perhaps the men had rushed out hoping to surrender before our troops were on them, or with despairing courage had brought their machine-guns into the open to kill

our first waves before their own death. Whatever their motive had been, many of these men had come out, and they lay in heaps, mangled by shell-fire that came across the fields to them in a deep belt of high explosives. Here under the sky they lay, a frightful witness against modern civilization, a bloody challenge to any gospel of love which men profess to believe. Over Nonne Boschen and Inverness Copse, and Polygon Wood beyond, and the long claw-like hook of the Passchendaele Ridge, the sky was clear at times and the water-pools reflected its light. But these places had no touch of loveliness because of the light. Once in history meek-eyed women walked in Nonne Boschen, which was Nun's Wood, and in Inverness Copse, as we call it, maids went with their mates in the glades. Now they are places haunted by ghastly memories, and there rises from them a miasma which sickens one's soul. Yet bright above the evil of them and clean above their filth there is the memory of that youth of ours who came here through fire and flame and fell here, so that the soil is sacred as their field of honour.

In the first phase of the battle of Flanders the new system of German defence was formidable. It was that "elastic system" by which Hindenburg hoped to relieve his men from the destructive fire of our artillery by holding his front line thinly in concrete blockhouses and organized shell-craters with enfilade positions for machine-gun fire, keeping his local reserves at quick striking distance for counter-attack. Our first waves of men flowed past and between these blockhouses in their struggle to attain their objectives, and were swept by cross-fire as they went forward, so that they were thinned out by the time they had reached the line of their advance. The succeeding waves were sometimes checked by German machine-gunners still holding out in undamaged shelters, and our troops in the new front line, weak and exhausted after hours of fighting, found themselves exposed to fierce counter-attacks in front while groups of the enemy were still behind them. For several weeks there were episodes of this kind, when our men had to give ground, though the line of advance seldom ebbed back to its starting line, and some progress was made however great the difficulties. Still the "pill-box" trouble was a serious menace, costly in life, and new methods of attack had to be devised during the progress of fighting when the area of the

2nd Army was extended on our left so that the 5th Army was relieved of some of its broad battle front. Our heavy howitzers concentrated on every blockhouse that could be located by aeroplane photographs or direct observation, with such storms of explosive that if they were not destroyed the garrisons of machine-gunners inside were killed or stupefied by concussion. Our method of attack in depth, as at Wytschaete and Messines—battalions advancing in close support of each other, so that the final objective was held by fresh troops to meet the inevitable counter-attacks—succeeded in a most striking way, in spite of the fearful condition of the ground. The enemy changed his new method of defence to meet this new method of attack. He went back to strongly held lines with support troops close forward, and had to pay the penalty by heavier losses under our artillery. The abominable weather and state of ground were his best lines of defence, and in August and October he had astounding luck.

Through all these battles our men were magnificent—not demi-gods, nor saints with a passion for martyrdom, nor heroes of melodrama facing death with breezy nonchalance while they read sweet letters from blue-eyed girls, but grim in attack and stubborn in defence, getting on with the job—a damned ugly job—as far as the spirit could pull the body and control the nerves. They were industrious as ants on this great muck-heap of the battlefield. Transport drivers, engineers, signallers, and pioneers laboured for victory as hard as infantry and gunners, and worked, for the most part, in evil places where there was always a chance of being torn to rags. The gunners, with their wheels sunk to the axles, served their batteries until they were haggard and worn, and they had little sleep and less comfort, and no hour of safety from infernal fire. They were wet from one week to another. They stood to the tags of their boots in mud. They had many of their guns smashed to spokes and splinters. They were lucky if lightly wounded. But their barrage-fire rolled ahead of the infantry at every attack and they shattered the enemy's divisions. The stretcher-bearers seemed to give no thought to their own lives in the rescue of the wounded; and down behind the lines—not always beyond range of gun-fire—doctors and hospital orderlies and nurses worked in the dressing-stations with the same dogged industry and courage as men who carried up duck-boards to the line,

drove teams of pack-mules up tracks under fire, or unloaded shells from trains that went puffing to the edge of the battle-fields. It was all part of the business of war. Wounded men who came back from battle were dealt with as so many cases of damaged goods, to be packed off speedily to make way for others. There was no time for sentiment—and no need of it. I used to go sometimes to an old mill-house on days of battle. During the Flanders fighting thousands of wounded men came to this place as a first stage on their journey to base hospitals. The lightly wounded used to sit in a long low tent beside the mill, round red-hot braziers, waiting in turn to have their wounds dressed. These crowds of men were of many battalions and of all types of English, Scottish, and Irish troops, with smaller bodies of Australians, New-Zealanders, Canadians, South-Africans, Newfoundlanders. They were clotted with mud and blood, and numb and stiff until the warmth of the braziers unfroze them. They sat silent as a rule, with their steel hats tilted forward, but there was hardly a groan from them, and never a whimper, nor any curse against the fate that had hit them. If I questioned them they answered with a stark simplicity of truth about the things they had seen and done, with often a queer glint of humour—grim enough, God knows, but humour still—in their tale of escape from death. Always after a talk with them I came away with a deep belief that the courage, honesty, and humanity of these boys were a world higher than the philosophy of their intellectual leaders, and I hated the thought that we have been brought to such a pass by the infamy of an enemy caste, and by the low ideals of Europe which have been our own law of life, that all this splendid youth, thinking straight, seeing straight, acting straight, without selfish motives, with clean hearts and fine bodies, should be flung into the furnace of war and scorched by its fires, and maimed, and blinded, and smashed. Only by the dire need of defence against the enemies of the world's liberty can such a sacrifice be justified, and that is our plea before the great Judge of Truth. Such thoughts haunt one if one has any conscience, but when I went among the troops on the roads or in their camps, and heard their laughter after battle or before it, and saw the courage of men refusing to be beaten down by the vilest conditions or heavy losses, and was a witness of their pride in the achievements of their own

battalions, I wondered sometimes whether the sufferings of these men were not so pitiful as I had thought. Their vitality helps them through many hardships. Their interest in life is so great that until death comes close it does not touch them—not many of them—with its coldness. In their comradeship they find a compensation for discomfort, and their keenness to win the rewards of skill and pluck is so high that they take great risks sometimes as a kind of sport, as Arctic explorers or big game hunters will face danger and endure great bodily suffering for their own sake. Those men are natural soldiers, though all our men are not like that. There are some even who like war, though very few. But most of them would jeer at any kind of pity for them, because they do not pity themselves, except in most dreadful moments which they put away from their minds if they escape. They scorn pity, yet they hate worse still, with a most deadly hatred, all the talk about "our cheerful men." For they know that however cheerful they may be it is not because of a jolly life or lack of fear. They loathe shell-fire and machine-gun fire. They know what it is "to have the wind up." They have seen what a battlefield looks like before it has been cleared of its dead. It is not for non-combatants to call them "cheerful." Because non-combatants do not understand and never will, not from now until the ending of the world. "Not so much of your cheerfulness," they say, and "Cut it out about the brave boys in the trenches." So it is difficult to describe them, or to give any idea of what goes on in their minds, for they belong to another world than the world of peace that we knew, and there is no code which can decipher their secret, nor any means of self-expression on their lips.

In this book the messages which I wrote from day to day are reprinted with only one alteration—though some are left out. For reasons of space (there is a limit to the length of a book) I have not included any narrative of the Cambrai battles, and thought it best to end this book with the gain of Passchendaele. The alteration is one which makes me very glad. I have been allowed to give the names of the battalions, which I could not do during the progress of the fighting because the enemy wanted to know our Order of Battle. For the first time, therefore, the world will know the regiments who fought without fame in the dismal anonymity of this war, with such

Spartan courage, up to that high crest of Passchendaele which was their goal, beyond the bogs and the beeks where masses of men struggled and fell. There is no criticism in this book, no judgment of actions or men, no detailed summing up of success and failure. That is not within my liberty or duty as a correspondent with the Armies in the Field. The Commander-in-Chief himself has summarized the definite gains of the campaign in Flanders:

"Notwithstanding the many difficulties, much has been achieved. Our captures in Flanders since the commencement of operations at the end of July amount to 20,065 prisoners, 74 guns, 941 machine-guns, and 131 trench-mortars. It is certain that the enemy's losses greatly exceeded ours. Most important of all, our new and hastily trained armies have shown once again that they are capable of meeting and beating the enemy's best troops, even under conditions which required the greatest endurance, determination, and heroism to overcome. The total number of prisoners taken in 1917, between the opening of the spring offensive on April 9 and the conclusion of the Flanders offensive, not including those captured in the battle of Cambrai, was 57,696, including 1290 officers. During the same period we captured also 109 heavy guns, 560 trench-mortars and 1976 machine-guns."

These are great gains in men and material, and the capture of the ridges has given us strong defensive positions which should be of high value to us in the new year of warfare calling to our men, unless the world's agony is healed by the coming of Peace.

[*I am indebted to Mr. Robert Donald, editor of the* Daily Chronicle, *for permission to republish the articles which I have written for that newspaper as a war correspondent with the British Army in the Field. My letters from the Front also appeared in the* Daily Telegraph *and a number of Provincial, American, and Colonial papers, and I am grateful for the honour of serving the great public of their readers.*]

PART I

RETREAT FROM THE SOMME

I

A NEW YEAR OF WAR

NEW YEAR'S EVE, 1916

LAST New Year's Eve—the end of a year which had been full of menace for our fighting men, because, at the beginning, our lines had no great power of guns behind them, and full of hopes that had been unfilled, in spite of all their courage and all their sacrifice—an artillery officer up in the Ypres salient waited for the tick of midnight by his wrist-watch (it gave a glow-worm light in the darkness), and then shouted the word "Fire!" . . . One gun spoke, and then for a few seconds there was silence. Over in the German line the flares went up and down, and it was very quiet in the enemy trenches, where, perhaps, the sentries wondered at that solitary gun. Then the artillery officer gave the word of command again. This time the battery fired nine rounds. A little while there was silence again, followed by another solitary shot, and then by six rounds. So did the artillery in the Ypres salient salute the birth of the New Year, born in war, coming to our soldiers and our race with many days of battle, with new and stern demands for the lives and blood of men.

To-night it is another New Year's Eve, and the year is coming to us with the same demands and the same promises, and the only difference between our hopes upon this night and that of a year ago is that by the struggle and endeavour of those past twelve months the ending is nearer in sight and the promise very near—very near as we hope and believe—its fulfilment. The guns will speak again to-night, saluting by the same kind

of sullen salvo the first day of the last year of war. The last year, if we have luck. It is raining now, a soft rain swept gustily across the fields by a wind so mild after all our wild weather that it seems to have the breath of spring in it. For a little while yesterday this mildness, and the sunlight lying over the battlefields, and a strange, rare inactivity of artillery, gave one just for one second of a day-dream a sense that Peace had already come and that the victory had been won. It was queer. I stood looking upon Neuville-St.-Vaast and the Vimy Ridge. Our trenches and the enemy's wound along the slopes in wavy lines of white chalk. There to my right was the Labyrinth and in a hollow the ruins of Souchez. When I had first come to these battlefields they were strewn with dead—French dead—after fighting frightful and ferocious in intensity. Unexploded shells lay everywhere, and the litter of great ruin, and storms of shells were bursting upon the Vimy Ridge.

The last time I went to these battlefields the high ridge of Vimy was still aflame, and British troops were attacking the mine-craters there. Yesterday all the scene was quiet, and bright sunlight gleamed upon the broken roofs of Neuville, and the white trenches seemed abandoned. The wet earth and leaves about me in a ruined farmyard had the moist scent of early spring. A man was wandering up a road where six months ago he would have been killed before he had gone a hundred yards. Lord! It looked like peace again! . . . It was only a false mirage. There was no peace. Presently a battery began to fire. I saw the shells bursting over the enemy's position. Now and again there was the sullen crump of a German "heavy." And though the trenches seemed deserted on either side they were held as usual by men waiting and watching with machine-guns and hand-grenades and trench-mortars. There is no peace!

* * * *

It was enormously quiet at times in Arras. The footsteps of my companion were startling as they clumped over the broken pavement of the square, and voices—women's voices—coming up from some hole in the earth sounded high and clear, carrying far, in an unearthly way, in this great awful loneliness of empty houses, broken churches, ruined banks and shops and restaurants, and mansions cloistered once in flower gardens behind high white walls. I went towards the women's voices as men in

darkness go towards any glimmer of light, for warmth of soul as well as of body.

A woman came up a flight of stone steps from a vaulted cellar and stared at me, and said, "Good day. Do you look for anything?"

I said, "I look only into your cellar. It is strange to find you living here. All alone—perhaps."

"It is no longer strange to me. I have been here, as you say, alone, all through the war, since the day of the first bombardment. That was on October 6, 1914. Before then I was not alone. I was married. But my husband was killed over there—you see the place where the shell fell. Since then I am alone."

For two years and two months she and other women of Arras—one came now to stand by her side and nod at her tale—have lived below ground, coming up for light and air when there is a spell of such silence as I had listened to, and going down to the dark vaults when a German "crump" smashes through another roof, or when German gas steals through the streets with the foul breath of death.

I asked her about the Kaiser's offer of peace. What did she think of that? I wondered what her answer would be—this woman imprisoned in darkness, hiding under daily bombardments, alone in the abomination of desolation. It was strange how quickly she was caught on fire by a sudden passion. All the tranquillity of her face changed, and there were burning sparks in her eyes. She was like a woman of the Revolution, and her laughter, for she began her answer with a laugh, was shrill and fierce.

"Peace! William offers peace, you say? Bah! It is nothing but humbug [la blague]. It is a trap which he sets at our feet to catch us. It is a lie."

She grasped my arm, and with her other hand pointed to the ruins over the way, to the chaos of old houses, once very stately and noble, where her friends lived before the fires of hell came.

"The Germans did that to us. They are doing it now. But it is not enough. What they have done to Arras they want to do to France—to smash the nation to the dust, to break the spirit of our race as they have broken all things here. They wish to deceive us to our further ruin. There will be no peace until Germany herself is laid in ashes, and her cities destroyed like Arras is destroyed, and her women left alone, with only the

ghosts of their dead husbands, as I live here alone in my cellar. Peace! Je m'en fiche de ça!"

There was a queer light in her eyes for a moment, in the eyes of this woman of Arras who saw down a vista of two years and two months all the fire and death that had been hurled into this city around her, and the bodies of little children in the streets, and her dead husband lying there on the cobble-stones, where now there was a great hole in the roadway piercing through to the vaults.

* * * *

I met other women of Arras. Two of them were young, daintily dressed as though for the boulevards of Paris, and they walked, swinging little handbags, down a street where at any moment a shell might come to tear them to pieces and make rags of them. Another was a buxom woman with a boy and girl holding her hands. The boy had been born to the sound of shell-fire. The girl was eight years old, but she now learns the history of France, not only out of school books, but out of this life in the midst of war.

"They are frightened—the little ones?" I asked. A solitary gun boomed and shook the loose stones of a ruined house.

The woman smiled and shrugged her shoulders.

"They are used to it all. Peace will seem strange to them."

"Will there ever be peace?" I asked.

The woman of Arras looked for a moment like the one I had spoken to on the steps of the cellar. Then she smiled, in a way that made me feel cold, for it was the smile of a woman who sees a vengeance for the wreckage of her life.

"There is no peace at Verdun," she said. "Our soldiers have done well there."

I said good day to her and went through the ruins again and out of the city, and stood watching an artillery duel up towards Souchez. The stabs of flame from our batteries were like red sparks in the deepening mist. They were like the fire in the eyes of the women who lived in cellars away back there in Arras, with a smouldering passion in the gloom and coldness of their lives.

* * * *

In many French villages the pipes are playing the New Year in, and their notes are full of triumph, but with a cry in them for those who have gone away with the old year, lying asleep

on the battlefields—so many brave Scots—like "the flowers o' the forest" and last year's leaves. I heard the pipes to-day in one old barn, where a feast was on, not far from where the guns were shooting through the mist with a round or two at odd moments, and though I had had one good meal, I had to eat another, even to the Christmas plum pudding, just to show there was no ill-feeling.

It was the pudding that threatened to do me down.

But it was good to sit among these splendid Scaforths and their feast, all packed together shoulder to shoulder, and back to back, under high old beams that grew in French forests five centuries ago. They were the transport men, who get the risks but not the glory. Every man here had ridden, night after night, up to the lines of death, under shell-fire and machine-gun fire, up by Longueval and Bazentin, carrying food for men and guns at their own risk of life. Every night now they go up again with more food for men and guns through places where there are now shell-craters in the roads, and the reek of poison gas.

The young transport officer by my side (who once went scouting in Delville Wood when the devil had it all his own way there) raised his glass of beer (the jug from which it had been poured stood a yard high in front of me) and wished "Good luck" to his men in the New Year of war, and bade them "wire in" to the feast before them. So in other Scottish billets the first of the New Year was kept, and to-night there is sword-dancing by kilted men as nimble as Nijinski, in their stockinged feet, and old songs of Scotland which are blown down the wind of France, in this strange nightmare of a war where men from all the Empire are crowded along the fighting-lines waiting for the bloody battles that will come, as sure as fate, while the New Year is still young.

* * * *

The queerest music I have heard in this war zone was three days ago, when I was walking down a city street. The city was dead, killed by storms of high explosives. The street was of shuttered houses, scarred by shell-fire, deserted by all their people, who had fled two years ago. I walked down this desolation, so quiet, so dead, where there was no sound of guns, that it was like walking in Pompeii when the lava was cooled. Suddenly there was the sound of a voice singing loud and clear

with birdlike trills, as triumphant as a lark's song to the dawn. It was a woman's voice singing behind the shutters of a shelled city! . . .

Some English officer was there with his gramophone.

II

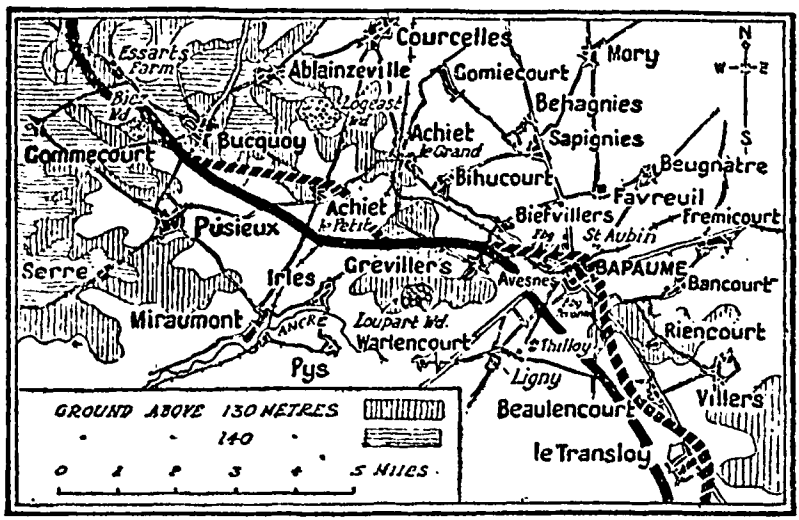
AN ATTACK NEAR LE TRANSLOY

JANUARY 28, 1917

THE "show" (as our men call it) near Le Transloy yesterday was more than a raid—those daily in-and-out dashes which are doing most deadly work along our line. It was an attack for the definite purpose of gaining an important bit of ground on the slope which goes down to the ruined village and of driving the enemy out of some strong points. The interest of it, involving the capture of six officers and 852 men of picked regiments, is the way in which we caught the enemy utterly by surprise and the rapid, easy way in which the whole operation was done. A touch which seems fantastic came at the end of the adventure when these young Germans, still breathless with the amazement of their capture, were bundled into omnibuses which had been brought up near the lines to wait for them—the old London omnibuses which used to go "all the way to the Bank—Bank—Bank!" in the days before the world began to crack—and taken to their camp on our side of the battlefields.

It was a grim, cold morning—piercingly cold, with a wind cutting like a knife across the snowfields. Not a morning when men might be expected to go out into the nakedness of No Man's Land. It was a morning when these German officers and men of the 119th and 121st Regiments, the Würtembergers of Königin Olga, were glad to stay down in the warmth of their dug-outs, cooking coffee on the little stove with which each man of these favoured troops was provided, to the great envy of Bavarians on their right, who go on shorter rations and fewer comforts. They had some good dug-outs in and near the Sunken Road—which runs up from Morval to Le Transloy, and strikes through a little salient in front of our

lines—till yesterday morning. The trenches on either side of the Sunken Road were not happy places for Würtembergers. For months past our guns had been pounding them so that they were mostly battered down, and only held here and there by little groups of men who dug themselves in. There was no wire in front of them, and here during the wet weather, and now during the great frost, the German troops (as we know



from the prisoners to-day) suffered badly from trench-feet and stomach troubles, and in spite of their moral (they were all stout-hearted men) from what the French call the "cafard," and we call the "hump."

Yesterday morning one or two shivering wretches stood sentry in the German line trying to gain shelter from the knife-blade of the wind. All others were below ground round the "fug" of their braziers. They believed the British over the way were just as quiet in the good work of keeping warm. That was their mistake. In our trenches the men were quiet, but busy, and above ground instead of below. They were waiting for a signal from the guns, and had their bayonets fixed and bombs slung about them, and iron rations hung to their belts. A rum ration was served round, and the men drank it, and felt the glow of it, so that the white waste of No Man's Land did not look so cold and menacing. They were men of the Border Regiment

and the Inniskillings of the 29th Division. Suddenly, at about half-past five, there was a terrific crash of guns, and at the same moment the men scrambled up into the open and with their bayonets low went out into No Man's Land, each man's footsteps making a trail in the snow. I think it took about four minutes, that passage of the lonely ground which was a hundred yards or so between the lines, all pock-marked with shell-holes, and hard as iron after the freezing of the quagmire. There was no preliminary bombardment. As soon as the guns went off the men went, with the line of shells not far in front of them. They found no men above ground when they pierced the German line. It was curious and uncanny—the utter lifelessness of the place they came to capture. Good, too, for men attacking, for men who always listen for the quick rush of bullets, which is the ugliest sound in war. Not a single machine-gun spat at them. They knew quickly that they had surprised the enemy utterly. They found the dug-outs and called down the challenge and heard it answered. The Würtembergers came up dazed with the effect of the capture, hardly believing it, as men in a dream. One of the officers explained: "We thought it was just a morning strafe. We kept down in the dug-outs till it was over. We had no idea of an attack. How did you get here so quickly?"

They were abashed. They said they would have put up a fight if they had had any kind of chance. But they were trapped. They could do nothing but surrender with the best grace possible. On the right, from two isolated bits of trench, there came a burst of rifle-fire. A few Germans there had time to recover from the stunning blow of the first surprise and fought pluckily till overpowered. The Borders and the Inniskillings went on farther than the objective given to them, to a point 500 yards away from the German first line, and established themselves there. From neighbouring ground, through the white haze over the snowfields, red lights went up with the S O S signal, and presently the German gunners got busy. But the prisoners were bundled back to the omnibuses, and the men took possession of the dug-outs. Proper organization was difficult above ground. It was too hard to dig. From the farthest point, later in the day, the men were withdrawn to the ground given to them for their objectives and German attempts to organize counter-attacks were smashed by our

artillery, because we have absolute observation of their movements from the higher ground won by great fighting in the Somme battles. To-day there was much gunning in all the neighbourhood of the fight, and the roar of guns rolled over the desolate fields of snow, the wide lonely waste which makes one's soul shiver to look at it as I stared at the scene of war, to-day and yesterday, in the teeth of the wind.

III

THE ABANDONMENT OF GRANDCOURT

FEBRUARY 8

THAT the troops of our Naval Division (the 63rd) should have been able to walk into Grandcourt yesterday and take the place after its abandonment by the enemy (except for a few men left behind to keep up appearances as long as possible, poor wretches) is a proof that the German High Command prefers, at this point of the struggle, to save casualties rather than to hold bad ground at any cost. It is a new phase, worthy of notice. A year ago he would not let his pride do this. Less than a year ago, when we took ground from him by a sudden assault, he would come back with a frightful counter-blow, and there would be a long and bloody struggle, as at the Bluff and St.-Eloi, over trenches taken and retaken. Combles was the first place from which he crept away without a fight. Grandcourt is the second place, abandoned for the same reason—because it was caught in the pincers of our forward movements. It lies low on the south side of the Ancre, below Miraumont, and it became a place of misery to German troops after the capture of Beaucourt and Beaumont-Hamel, on the other side of the river—still worse when on Sunday last our men advanced north of Beaucourt, capturing a couple of hundred prisoners and consolidating on a line of ground dominating Grandcourt, on the north-west. It was probably then that the enemy decided to withdraw to a stronger and higher position south of Miraumont and Pys, which he has been digging and defending with rapid industry in spite of the hard frost, which double the labour of the spade. Fear, which is a great General makes

him a hard digger, and he will burrow underground while our men are scraping the snow away on our side of the line. A few men, as I have said, were left behind to make a show. They were seen moving about in the neighbourhood of a German trench barring the way to Grandcourt on the south-west. It was some time before our patrols, creeping out over the snow, saw that this half-mile of line was empty of men, and that the enemy had gone back to some place unknown. On Tuesday our troops moved into this position, watched by those few men, left as scarecrows, who are now our prisoners, and who saw the English soldiers get up out of their ditches and shell-craters and cross the snowfield in open order with a steady trudge, their bayonets glittering, and then drop down into the battered trench in which there was nothing but the litter of former habitation and some dead bodies. Yesterday it was decided to push on to Grandcourt. Observing officers could see the snow on the broken roofs and ruined walls of that village, where bits of brick and woodwork still stand after heavy bombardment. They could not see whether the place was still held. Only actual contact would show whether those quiet ruins would be noisy with the chatter of machine-gun fire if our men went in. A sinister spot—with an evil-sounding name to soldiers of the Somme, because here for many months the enemy had massed his guns which fired down to Contalmaison and flung high explosives over the country below the Pozières Ridge.

It was in the afternoon that the entry was made beneath a great barrage of our shells advancing beyond the infantry and through a heavy fire from the enemy's guns, which did not check the advance of our men. A few German soldiers were taken in rear-guard posts. They came out of shell-craters with their hands up, and were sent back to our lines. There was no fighting in the ruins of the village. Grandcourt was ours, with its deep dug-outs littered with German clothes and stored with rations of German soldiers, which our own men enjoyed as a change of diet, while they took cover from the enemy's shell-fire over his old home.

Last night in the light of a full moon, curiously red so that the snow was faintly flushed, two more attacks were made and two more positions taken, north and south-east of Grandcourt. On the north side of the Ancre Baillescourt Farm was seized,

and in its neighbourhood eighty soldiers and one officer were made prisoner. They belonged to the same corps as those I saw last Sunday, and were recruited from the Hamburg-Altona district; all stout fellows, well nourished and well clothed. They had not expected the attack, not so soon, anyhow, and were caught in dug-outs by the ruined farmhouse, which some months ago was a good landmark with its white walls and barns still standing. Now it is but a litter of beams and broken plaster, like all houses along the line of battle.

IV

THE GORDONS IN THE BUTTE DE WARLENCOURT

FEBRUARY 9

THE frost lasts. Even in times of peace I suppose it would be remembered years hence because of its intensity of cold and continuance. Here on the Western Front it will be remembered by men who live, now very young, and then with hair as white as the snow which now lies in No Man's Land, because of its unforgettable pictures in sunlight and moonlight, its fantastic cruelties of coldness and discomfort, and its grim effect upon the adventures of war when the patrols go out by night and British soldiers crawl across snow-filled shell-holes.

There was a queer episode of Canadian history—only a few days old—which began when a sprightly young Dados (he's the fellow that gets all the chaff from the Divisional Follies) startled a respectable old lady behind the counter of a milliner's shop in a French village by demanding 100 ladies' "nighties" ("chemises de nuit" he called them) of the largest size. The village heard the story of this shopping expedition, listened to the old lady's shrill cackle of laughter, and wondered what joke was on among the Canadian troops. It was one of those jokes which belong to the humours of this war, mixed with blood and death. Up in the Canadian trenches there were shouts of hoarse laughter, as over their khaki a hundred brawny young Canadians put on the night-dresses. They had been tied up with blue ribbon. The old moon, so watchful there in the steel-blue sky, had never looked down upon a stranger scene than these white-robed soldiers who went out into No Man's

Land, with rifles and bombs. Some of the night-dresses, so clean and dainty as they had come out of the milliner's shop, were stained red before the end of the adventure. And Germans in their dug-outs caught a glimpse of these fantastic figures before death came quickly, or a shout of surrender. The Pierrots went back with some prisoners in the moonlight, and Canadian staff officers chuckled with laughter along telephone wires when the tale was told.

Some of the prisoners who are taken do nothing but weep for the first few days after capture. "The prisoners are young," reports the Intelligence officer about the latest batch, "and have wept copiously since their capture." The men I have seen myself during the past few days had a look of misery in their eyes. They hate these midnight raids of ours, coming suddenly upon them night after night through the white glimmer of the snowfields. They have taken dogs into the trenches now to give a quicker and surer warning than young sentries, who are afraid to cry out when they see white figures moving, because they think they see them always, when shadows stir in the moonlight across the snow. Our men during recent nights have heard these dogs giving short, sharp barks. One of them came out into No Man's Land and sniffed about some black things lying quiet under the cover of snow. No alarm was given when some friends of mine went out to make an attack some nights ago, and it was lucky for them, for if they had been discovered too soon all their plans would have been spoilt, and white smocks would not have saved them.

They were the 8/10th Gordons of the 15th Division. Some of my readers will remember the crowd, for I have described my meetings with them up and down the roads of war. It is they who arranged the details of the night's adventure, and because it is typical of the things that happen—of the Terror that comes in the night—it is worth telling. The Highlanders, when they took up their attacking line, were dressed in white smocks covering their kilts, and in steel helmets painted white. Their black arms and feet were like the smudges on the snow. They lay very quiet, visible on the left, from the Butte de Warlencourt, that old high mound in the Somme battlefields which was once the burial-place of a prehistoric man and is now the tomb of young soldiers in the Durham Light Infantry who fought and

London: Wm Heinemann

Stanford's Geog! Estab!, London.

died there. The moon was bright on the snow about them, but a misty vapour was on the ground. Each man had been warned not to cough or sneeze. Their rifles were loaded, and with bayonets fixed, so that there should be no rattle of arms or clicks of bolts. They were in two parties, and their orders were to overthrow the advanced German posts which were known to be in front of the Butte, and to form a ring of posts round the position attacked while its dug-outs were being dealt with. A heavy barrage was fired suddenly up and down the German lines, so as to bewilder the enemy as to the point of attack, and the Gordons in their white smocks rose up and advanced. Two shots rang out from one of the German posts. No more than that. The two waves of men went on. Those on the right flank had trouble in crossing the ground. Several of them fell into deep shell-craters frozen hard. A machine-gun was fired on the left, but was then silenced by our shell-fire. The men inclined a little to the left, and came round on the west side of the position, where there was a small quarry. On their way they surprised an enemy post and took six prisoners.

A little way farther on they came across a trench-mortar, a dug-out, and two terror-stricken men. An officer put a Stokes bomb down the mortar and blew it up. The men were taken, and the dug-out was destroyed. Then the Gordons went on to the Butte de Warlencourt. Underneath it were the dug-outs of a German company, snow-capped and hidden. The Scots went round like wolves hunting for the way down. There were four ways down, and three of them were found low down about four yards apart. Men were talking down there excitedly. Their German speech was loud and there was the note of terror in it.

"Come out!" shouted the Gordons several times; but at one entrance only one man came out, and at another only one, and at the third twelve men, who were taken prisoners. The others would not surrender. Some bombs and a Stokes shell were thrown down the doorways, and suddenly this nest of dug-outs was seen to collapse, and black smoke came up from the pit, melting the edges of the snow. Down below the voices went on, rising to high cries of terror. Then flames appeared, shedding a red glare over No Man's Land.

On the left the Gordons had been held up by machine-gun fire and rifle-fire, which came across to them from a trench to

which they were advancing. At the west side of the trench, in a wired enclosure, the machine-gun was troublesome. Some of the white smocks fell. An attempt was made to rush it, but failed. Afterwards the gun and the team were knocked out by a shell. A group of Germans came out of the trench and started bombing, until a Stokes bomb scattered them. Then the Gordons went down and brought out some prisoners, and blew up a dug-out.

It was time to go back, for the German barrage had begun; but the Gordons were able to get home without many casualties. Nearly two hours afterwards a loud explosion was heard across the way, as though a bomb store had blown up. The sky was red over there by the flare of a fire. . . . In the dug-outs of the Butte de Warlencourt a whole company of Germans was being burnt alive.

V

THE BATTLE OF BOOM RAVINE

FEBRUARY 15

ON the way to Miraumont there was a deep gully called Boom Ravine, and here on February 17 there was fierce fighting by the Royal Fusiliers, the Northamptons, and the Middlesex men of the 29th Division.

In difficulty, in grim human courage, in all its drama of fog, and darkness, and shell-fire, and death, it seems to me to hold most of what this war means to individual men—all that can be asked of them in such hours.

The thaw had just set in and the ground was soppy, which was bad luck. In spite of the thaw, it was horribly, damply cold, but the men had been given a good meal before forming up for the attack, and officers brought up the rum ration in bottles, so that the men could attack with some warmth in them. In the utter darkness, unable to make any glimmer of light lest the enemy should see, the brigades tried to get into line. Two companies lost themselves, and were lost, but got into touch again in time. It was all black and beastly. A great fire of high explosives burst over our assembly lines. The darkness was lit up by the red flashes of these bursting shells. Men fell,

wounded and dead. The Royal Fusiliers were specially tried, and their brigadier wondered whether they would have the spirit to get up and attack when the hour arrived. But when the moment came the survivors rose and went forward, and fought through to the last goal. They were the first to get to Grandcourt Trench, which lay between them and the Boom Ravine. The wire was not cut, and there was a hammering of machine-guns and the swish of machine-gun bullets. This battalion had already lost all its officers, who had gone forward gallantly, leading their men and meeting the bullets first. A sergeant-major took command, shouted to his men to keep steady, and found a gap through the wire. They forced their way through, passed Grandcourt Trench, and, with other men, dropped into Boom Ravine.

That place is a sunken road, almost parallel with Grandcourt Trench, and with South Miraumont Trench beyond. Before war came—even last summer, indeed—it was like a Devonshire lane, with steep shelving banks, thirty to forty feet high, and trees growing on either side, with overhanging roots. It was not like a Devonshire lane when our men scrambled and fell down its banks. It was a ravine of death. Our shell-fire had smashed down all the trees, and their tall trunks lay at the bottom of the gulley, and their branches were flung about. The banks had been opened out by shell-craters, and several of the German dug-outs built into the sides of them were upheaved or choked. Dead bodies or human fragments lay among the branches and broken woodwork. A shell of ours had entered one dug-out and blown six dead men out of its doorway. They sprawled there at the entrance. Inside were six other dead. From dug-outs not blown up or choked came groups of German soldiers, pallid and nerve-broken, who gave themselves up quickly enough. One man was talkative. He said in perfect English that he had been coachman to an English earl, and he cursed our artillery, and said that if he could get at our blinking gunners he would wring their blighted necks—or words to that effect.

But the battle was not over yet. While Boom Ravine was being cleared of its living inhabitants by the Royal Fusiliers other waves were coming up; or, rather, not waves, but odd groups of men, dodging over the shell-craters, and hunting as they went for German snipers, who lay in their holes firing until

they were pinned by bayonet-points. Their bodies lie there now, curled up. Some of them pretended to be dead when our men came near. One of them lay still, with his face in the moist earth. "See that that man is properly dead," said an officer, and a soldier with him pricked the man. He sprang up with a scream, and ran hard away—to our lines. Six prisoners came trudging back from the Ravine, with a slightly wounded man as an escort. On the way back they found themselves very lonely with him, and passed some rifles lying in their way. They seized the rifles and became fighting men again, until a little Welsh officer of the South Wales Borderers met them, and killed every one of them with a revolver.

VI

THE ENEMY WITHDRAWS

FEBRUARY 18

THE enemy is steadily withdrawing his troops from many positions between Hebuterne and the ground south-west of Bapaume, and our patrols are pushing forward into abandoned country, which they have penetrated in some places for nearly three miles beyond our former line. They are already north-west of Serre, south of Irles, above Miraumont, Petit-Miraumont and Pys, which are now in our hands without a battle. We have gained a number of German strongholds which we expected to win only by heavy fighting, and the enemy has yielded to our pressure, the ceaseless pressure of men and guns, by escaping to a new line of defence along the Bapaume Ridge. This is the most notable movement which has taken place in the war since the autumn of the first year. The German retirement in the battle of the Marne was forced upon them only by actual defeat on the ground. This is a strategical retreat, revealing a new phase of weakness in their defensive conditions. It has not come to our Generals as a surprise. After the battle of Boom Ravine, there were several signs that the enemy contemplated a withdrawal from the two Miraumonts, and our recent capture of Baillescourt Farm and the ground on the north of the Ancre seriously menaced Serre. Yesterday morning, through a heavy grey mist, fires were seen burning along the German

front line. For several days the enemy's field-batteries had been firing an abnormal amount of ammunition, and it seemed likely that they were getting rid of their supplies in the forward dumps before withdrawing their guns. Patrols sent out had a queer, uncanny experience. It was very quiet in the mist, almost alarmingly quiet. They pushed in after the enemy. Not a sound, not a shot came from Serre. . . . These reports were sent back, and more patrols were sent forward in various directions. They pushed on, picking up a few prisoners here and there who were sniping from shell-holes and serving solitary machine-guns. These men confessed that they had been left behind with orders to keep firing and to make a show so that we might believe the ground was still strongly held. Farther on the right the same thing was happening. Patrols went out and sent back messages saying that no enemy was ahead. They went into Miraumont, and in the centre of the main road a mine blew up with a loud explosion; but by great good luck none of our men were hurt. At the end of the street six Germans were seen among the ruins. They were fired at and disappeared. Miraumont was taken without another shot than this, and with it Little Miraumont, next door.

Last night our troops advanced towards Warlencourt and south of Irles, and they took possession of the famous Butte, that high mound above the bones of some prehistoric man, for which there had been so much bloody fighting in the autumn and the first month of this year. From the direction of Bapaume the noise of heavy explosions was heard, as though ammunition dumps were being blown up, and for the first time perhaps since the German retreat from the Marne the enemy was destroying his own material of war on his way back.

VII

OUR ENTRY INTO GOMMECOURT

FEBRUARY 28

LAST night the German troops abandoned Gommecourt and Pusieux and our men followed the first patrols, who had felt forward and took possession of the salient which keeps to the line of the park surrounding the famous old château.

This entry into Gommecourt without a fight was most sensational. It was here on July 1 of 1916 that waves of London men of the 56th Division assaulted an almost impregnable position, and by the highest valour and sacrifice broke and held its lines until forced back by massed gun-fire which threatened them with annihilation. Many of our dead lay there, and the place will be haunted for ever by the memory of their loss and great endurance. At last the gates were open. The enemy's troops had stolen away in the dusk, leaving nothing behind but the refuse of trench life and the litter of trench tools. In order to keep the way open for their withdrawal, strong posts of Germans with machine-guns held out in a wedge just south of Rossignol Wood and in Biez Wood, which is west of Bucquoy. These rear-guard posts, numbering an officer or two and anything between thirty to sixty men with machine-guns, and telephones keeping them in touch with the main army, were chosen for their tried courage and intelligence, and stayed behind with orders to hold on to the last possible moment.

All the tricks of war are being used to check and kill our patrols. In addition to trip-wires attached to explosives, German helmets have been left about with bombs concealed in them so as to explode on being touched, and there are other devices of this kind which are ingenious and devilish. The enemy's snipers and machine-gunners give our men greater trouble, but are being routed out from their hiding-places. There were a lot of them in the ruins of Pusieux, but last night, after sharp fighting and a grim man-hunt among the broken brickwork, the enemy was destroyed in this village, and our line now runs well beyond it to Gommecourt, on the left and down to Irles on the right. The enemy has destroyed Irles church tower, as he has destroyed the church of Achiet-le-Petit, and the famous clock tower of Bapaume, on which we tried to read the time from the high ground westward during the battles of the Somme. This is to get rid of observation which might be useful to us in our advance.

Heavy shell-fire has been concentrated by enemy batteries on the village of Irles, and he is also barraging with high explosives upon Serre, Miraumont, Grandcourt, and other places from which he has withdrawn. It is probable that he is using up his reserves of ammunition in the dumps along the line of his retirement. Many of his heavy guns still remain on

railway mountings behind Bapaume—we are now less than a mile from that town—and they are doing double duty by quick firing. The latest village to fall into our hands is Thilloy, north of Ligny-Thilloy, and just south of Bapaume, and the enemy is now retiring to Loupart Wood, Achiet-le-Petit, and Bucquoy, strongly defended for the time being by a thick belt of wire.

It is enormously interesting to speculate upon this new plan of the German High Command. It is a plan forced upon him by steady pressure of our attacks, which thrust him into bad ground, where the condition of his troops was hideous, but, beyond all, by the fear that our fighting power in the spring might break his armies if they stayed on their old line. Now he is executing with skill, aided by great luck—for the foggy weather is his luck—a manœuvre designed to shorten his line, thereby increasing his offensive and defensive man-power, and to withdraw in the way that he intends to make it difficult for pursuit, and so to gain time to fall back upon new and stronger lines of defence.

* * * *

It is difficult to describe the feelings of our men who go forward to these villages and capture them, and settle down in them for a day or two, unless you have gazed at those places for months through narrow slits in underground chambers, and know that it would be easier to go from life to eternity than cross over the enemy's wire into those strongholds while they are inhabited by men with machine-guns.

You cannot imagine the thrill of walking one day into Gommecourt, or Miraumont, or Irles, without resistance, and seeing in close detail the way of life led by the men who have been doing their best to kill you. There is something uncanny in handling the things they handled, in sitting at the tables where they took their meals, in walking about the ruins which our guns made above them. I had this thrill when I walked through Gommecourt—Gommecourt the terrible, and the graveyard of so many brave London boys who fell here on July 1—and up through Gommecourt Park, with its rows of riven trees, to a point beyond, and to a far outpost where a group of soldiers attached to the Sherwood Foresters of the 46th Division, full of spirit and gaiety, in spite of the deadly menace about them, had dragged up a heavy trench-mortar and its monstrous winged shells, which they were firing into a copse 500 yards

away where Fritz was holding out. So through the snow I went into Gommecourt down a road pitted with recent shell-holes, and with a young Sherwood Forester who said, "It's best to be quick along this track. It ain't a health resort."

It was not a pretty place at all, and there were nasty noises about it, as shells went singing overhead, but there was a sinister sense of romance, a look of white and naked tragedy in snow-covered Gommecourt. Our guns had played hell with the place, though we could not capture it on July 1. Thousands of shells, even millions, had flung it into ruin—the famous château, the church, the great barns, the school-house, and all the buildings here. Not a tree in what had once been a noble park remained unmutilated. On the day before the Germans left a Stokes mortar battery of ours fired 1100 shells into Gommecourt in a quarter of an hour.

"No wonder old Fritz left in a hurry," said the young officer who had achieved this record. He chuckled at the thought of it, and as he went through Gommecourt with me pointed out with pride the "top-hole" effect of all our gun-fire. To him, as a gunner, all this destruction was a good sight. He stopped in front of a hole big enough to bury a country cottage, and said, "That was done by old Charley's 9·45 trench-mortar. Some hole, what?"

"Looks as if some German officer had had to walk home," said the trench-mortar officer, who was a humorous fellow, as he glanced at a shattered motor-car.

So many of the young officers of ours are humorous fellows, and I am bound to say that I never met a merrier party than a little lot I found at a spot called Pigeon Wood, far beyond Gommecourt, where the enemy flings shells most of the day and night, so that it is a litter of broken twigs and branches.

A sergeant-major took me up there and introduced me to his officers.

"This is the real Street of Adventure," he said, "though it's a long way from Fleet Street"—which I thought was pretty good for a sergeant-major met in a casual way on a field of battle. It appeared that there was to be a trench-mortar "stunt" in half an hour or so, and he wanted me to see "the fun." Through the driving snow we went into the bit of wood, trampling over the broken twigs and stepping aside from shell-holes, and because of the nasty noises about—I hear no

music in the song of the shell—I was glad when the sergeant-major went down the entrance of a dug-out and called out for the officer.

It was one of the deep German dug-outs thirty or forty feet down, and very dark on the way. In the room below, nicely panelled, were the merry grigs I had come to meet, and in less than a minute they had made me welcome, and in less than five I was sitting on a German chair at a German table, drinking German soda-water out of German glasses, with a party of English boys 500 yards from the German outposts over the way.

They told me how they had brought their trench-mortar up. It was an absolute record, and they were as proud and pleased as schoolboys who have won a game. They roared with laughter at the story of the senior officer chased by two Boches, and roared again when the captain sent round to the " chemist's shop " next door for some more soda-water and a bottle of whisky. They had found thousands of bottles of soda-water, and thousands of bombs and other things left behind in a hurry, including a complete change of woman's clothing, now being worn by one of our Tommies badly in need of clean linen.

" This dug-out is all right," said one of the younger officers, " but you come and see mine. It's absolutely priceless."

It was one of the best specimens of German architecture I have ever seen on a battlefield. It was not only panelled but papered. It was furnished elegantly with a washhand-stand and a gilded mirror and German coloured prints—and not all our shells could touch it, because of its depth below the ground. . . . I saw the trench-mortar " stunt," which flung up volcanoes in the German ground by Kite Copse, and stood out in the snow with a party of men who had nothing between them and the enemy but a narrow stretch of shell-broken earth, and went away from the wood just as the enemy began shelling it again, and sat down under the bank with one of the officers when the enemy " bracketed " the road back with whiz-bangs, and stopped on the way to take a cup of tea in another dug-out, and to make friends with other men who were following up the enemy, and moving into German apartments for a night or so, before they go farther on, with that keen and spirited courage which is the only good thing in this war. They are mostly boys—I am a Rip Van Winkle to them—and with the heart of

boyhood they take deadly risks lightly and make a good joke of a bad business, and are very frightened sometimes and make a joke of that, and are great soldiers though they were never meant for the trade. The enemy is falling back still, but these boys of ours are catching him up, and are quick in pursuit, in spite of the foul ground and the foul weather and the barrage of his guns.

VIII

WHY THE ENEMY WITHDREW

MARCH 3

THE weather is still favourable to the enemy in his plan of withdrawal. Yesterday there was over all the battlefields such a solid fog, after a night of frost which condensed the earth's moisture, that one could not see fifty yards ahead. Our airmen, if they had thought it worth while mounting, would have stared down into this white mist and seen nothing else. Our gunners had to fire "off the map" at a time when direct observation would have been most valuable. I do not remember to have seen anything so uncanny on this front as the effect of our men moving in this heavy wet darkness like legions of shadows looming up in a grey way, and then blotted out. The fog clung to them, dripped from the rims of their steel helmets, made their breath like steam. The shaggy coats of horses and mules plastered with heavy streaks of mud were all damp with little beads of moisture as white as hoar-frost.

Nothing so far in this German movement has been sensational except the fact itself. Fantastic stories about gas-shells, battles, and great slaughter in the capture of the enemy's positions are merely conjured up by people who know nothing of the truth.

The truth is simple and stark. The enemy decided to withdraw, and made his plans to withdraw with careful thought for detail in order to frustrate any preparations we might have made to deal him the famous knock-out blow and in order to save his man-power, not only by escaping this great slaughter which was drawing near upon him as the weeks passed, but by shortening his line and so liberating a number of divisions for offensive and defensive purposes. He timed this strategical withdrawal well. He made use of the hard frost for the

movement of men and guns and material, and withdrew the last men from his strongholds on the old line just as the thaw set in, so that the ground lapsed into quagmire more fearful than before the days of the long frost, and pursuit for our men and our guns and our material was doubly difficult. He destroyed what he could not take away, and left very little behind. He fired many of his dug-outs, and left only a few snipers and a few machine-gunners in shell-holes and strong posts to hold up our patrols while the next body of rear-guard outposts fell back behind the barbed wire in front of the series of diagonal trench lines which defend the way to Bapaume. In Gommecourt our troops found only one living man, and he was half dead and quite blind. He had been wounded twenty-four hours previously by a bomb from one of our scouts and had crawled back into a dug-out. It is astounding, but, I believe, quite true, that he knew nothing about the abandonment of Gommecourt, even when it had been achieved. He would not believe it when our men told him. He had lain in his earth-hole wondering at the silence, believing himself deaf as well as blind, except that he could hear the crash of shells. He was frightened because he could hear no movement of his fellow-soldiers.

The German scheme is undoubtedly to delay our advance as much as possible and at the cheapest price to himself, so that much time may have elapsed (while his submarines are still at work, and his diplomats, and his propaganda) before we come up to him with all our weight of men and metal upon the real lines to which he is falling back. By belts of barbed wire between the lines of retirement, down past Loupart Wood, and then past Grevillers and Achiet, and outside Bapaume, as well as by strong bodies of picked troops holding on to these positions until the last moment before death or capture or escape, and by massing guns eastward of Bapaume in order to impede our pursuit by long-range fire from his "heavies," and to hold the pivot while his troops swing back in this slow and gradual way, he hopes to make things easy for himself and damnably difficult for us.

* * * *

MARCH 12

LOUPART WOOD, a high belt of trees, thick and black against the sky, is the storm-centre of the battle line on this part of

the front. Our guns were busy with it, flinging shells into its network of naked branches. The shell-bursts were white against its blackness, and the chalky soil in front of it was tossed up in spraying fountains. From the enemy's side high explosives were dropping over Miraumont, and Irles was being heavily bombarded. It was like a day in the first battles of the Somme, and brought back to me old memories of frightfulness. Behind me were the Somme battlefields, one vast landscape of the abomination of desolation strewn still with the litter of great conflict, with thousands of unexploded shells lying squat in mud, and hideously tormented out of all semblance of earth's sweet beauty by millions of shell-holes and the yawning chasms of mine-craters, and the chaos of innumerable trenches dug deep and then smashed by the fury of heavy guns. That is an old picture which I have described, or failed to describe, a score of times when over this mangled earth, yard by yard, from one ruin to another, from one copse of broken woodland to another group of black gallows which were trees, our men went fighting, so that here is the graveyard of gallant youth, and the Field of Honour which is sacred to the soul of our race. It was the old picture, but into it came to-day as yesterday new men of ours who are carrying on the tale to whatever ending it may have. They came through mud and in mud and with mud. The heavy horses of the gunners and transport men were all whitened with the wet chalk to the ears. Mules were ridiculous, like amphibious creatures who had come up out of the slime to stare with wicked eyes at what men are doing with the earth's surface. Eight-inch guns were wallowing in bogs from which their shiny snouts thrust up, belching forth flame. Over the wide, white, barren stretch of hell which we call the battlefield their monstrous shells went howling after the full-throated roars which clouted one's ear-drums like blows from a hammer. And between the guns, and in front of the guns, and past the guns went our marching men, our mud men, with wet steel helmets, with gobs of mud on their faces, with clods of mud growing monstrously upon their boots at every step.

A grim old war, fantastic in its contrasts and in its stage properties! Once when I heard the chimes of midnight in Covent Garden and stood drinking at a coffee-stall by Paul's Church I never guessed I should find such a place of wayside

refreshment, such a house on wheels, in the middle of Armageddon. But there it was to-day, a coffee-stall bang in the middle of the battlefield, and there, asking for a "mug o' thick," stood a crowd of English soldiers, worse scarecrows than the night birds of the London slums and more in need of warmth for body and soul. Not far away, well under shell-fire, was a London omnibus, and as a mate in evil days, a Tank.

The rain came down in a thick drizzle. Loupart Wood disappeared like a ghost picture. Irles was blotted out. Our eight-inch shells went howling out of a cotton-wool mist. Our men went marching with their steel hats down against the beat of the rain. It was a wintry scene again—but on the moist air there was a faint scent not of winter—a smell of wet earth sweeter than the acrid stench of the battlefields. It was the breath of spring coming with its promise of life. And with its promise of death.

* * * *

The enemy is still holding out in Achiet-le-Petit and Bucquoy, though I believe his residence there is not for long. From what I saw to-day watching our bombardment of the line to which he has retreated, it seems certain that he will be compelled to leave in a hurry, just as he left Loupart Wood the night before last.

As I went over the battlefields to-day it was made visible to me that the enemy has suffered most devilish torments in the ground from which he is now retreating. All north of Courcelette, up by Miraumont and Pys, and below Loupart Wood, this wild chaos—all so upturned by shell-fire that one's gorge rises at the sight of such obscene mangling of our mother earth—is strewn with bodies of dead German soldiers. They lie grey wet lumps of death over a great stretch of ground, many of them half buried by their comrades or by high explosives. Most of them are stark above the soil with their eye-sockets to the sky. I stood to-day in a ravine to which the Regina Trench leads between Pys and Miraumont, and not any morbid vision of an absinthe-maddened dream of hell could be more fearful than what I stared at standing there, with the rain beating on me across the battlefield, and the roar of guns on every side, and the long rushing whistles of heavy shells in flight over Loupart Wood. The place was a shambles of

German troops. They had had machine-gun emplacements here, and deep dug-outs under cover of earth-banks. But our guns had found them out and poured fire upon them. All this garrison had been killed and cut to pieces before or after death. Their bodies or their fragments lay in every shape and shapelessness of death, in puddles of broken trenches or on the edge of deep ponds in shell-craters. The water was vivid green about them, or red as blood, with the colour of high-explosive gases. Mask-like faces, with holes for eyes, seemed to stare back at me as I stared at them, not with any curiosity in this sight of death—for it is not new to me—but counting their numbers and reckoning the sum of all these things who a little time ago were living men. Some of our dead lay among them, but out of 850 lying hereabouts, 700 were German soldiers.

Our gun-fire, continued to-day as yesterday, leaves nothing alive or whole when it is concentrated on a place like this, deliberate in smashing it. Here it had flung up machine-gun emplacements and made rubbish-heaps of their casemates and guns. It had broken hundreds of rifles into matchwood, and flung up the kit of men from deep dug-outs, littering earth with their pouches and helmets and bits of clothing. Where I stood was only one patch of ground on a wide battlefield. It is all like that, though elsewhere the dead are not so thickly clustered. For miles it is all pitted with ten-feet craters intermingling and leaving not a yard of earth untouched. It is one great obscenity, killing for all time the legend of war's glory and romance. Over it to-day went a brave man on his mission. He was not a soldier, though he had a steel hat on his head and a khaki uniform. He was a padre who, with a fellow-officer and a few men, is following up the fighting men, burying those who fall, our own and the enemy's. He collects their identity discs and marks their graves. For weeks he has done this, and, though he is sickened, he goes on with a grim zeal, searching out the new dead, directing the digging of new graves, covering up Germans who lie so thick. He waved his hand to me as he went up to Loupart Wood, and I saluted him as a man of fine enthusiasm and good courage in the abomination of desolation which is our battle-ground.

The secret of the German retreat is here on this ground. To save themselves from another such shambles they are falling

back to new lines, where they hope to be safer from our massed artillery. But as I saw to-day our gun-fire is following them closely and forcing them back at a harder pace, and killing them as they go. The horror of war is still close at their heels, and will never end till the war ends, though that may be long, O Lord! from now.

IX

THE AUSTRALIANS ENTER BAPAUME

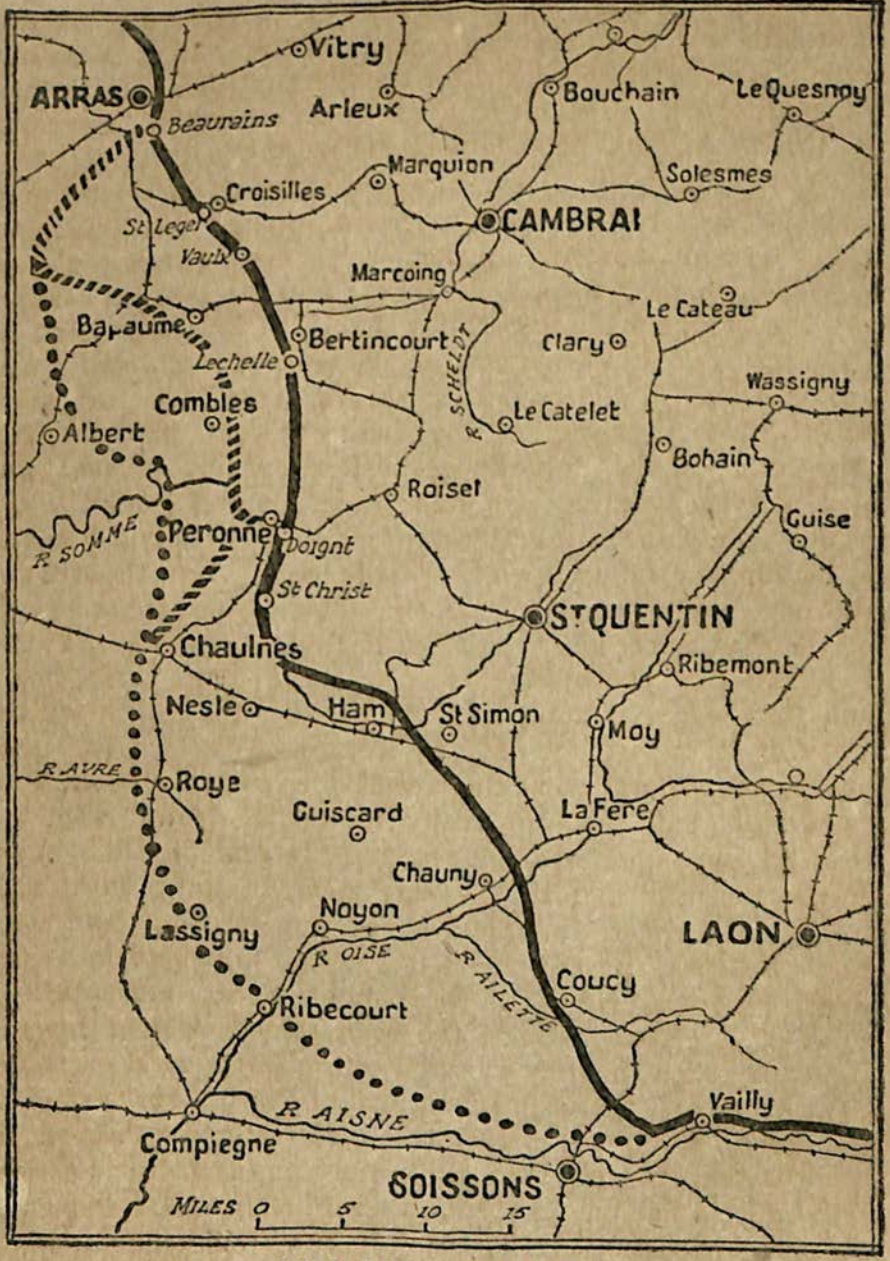
MARCH 17

TO-DAY quite early in the morning our Australian troops entered Bapaume. Achiet-le-Petit and Biefvillers also fell into our hands and the enemy is in retreat across the plains below the Bapaume Ridge.

I had the honour of going into Bapaume myself this morning, and the luck to come out again, and now, sitting down to tell the history of this day—one of the great days in this war—I feel something of the old thrill that came to all of us when the enemy fell back from the Marne and retreated to the Aisne.

Bapaume is ours after a short, sharp fight with its last rear-guard post. I don't know how much this will mean to people at home, to whom the town is just a name, familiar only because of its repetition in dispatches. To us out here it means enormous things—above all, the completion or result of a great series of battles, in which many of our best gave their lives so that our troops could attain the ridge across which they went to-day, and hold the town which is the gateway to the plains beyond. For this the Canadians fought through Courcelette, where many of their poor bodies lie even now in the broken ground. For this the Australians struggled with most grim heroism on the high plateau of Pozières, which bears upon every yard of its soil the signs of the most frightful strife that mankind has known in all the history of warfare. For another stage on the road to Bapaume London regiments went up to Eaucourt-l'Abbaye, and the Gordons stormed the white mound of the Butte de Warlencourt. For the capture of Bapaume our patrols with machine-guns and trench-mortars, and our gunners with their batteries, have pushed on through the day and night during recent weeks, gaining La Barque and Ligny and

Thilloy, not sleeping night after night, not resting, so that beards have grown on young chins, and the eyes of these men look glazed and dead except for the fire that lights up in them when there is another bit of work to do. For this, thousands of British soldiers have laboured like ants—it is all like a monstrous ant-heap in commotion—carrying up material of war, building roads over quagmires, laying down railroads under shell-fire, plugging up shell-craters with bricks and stone so that the horse transport can follow, and the guns get forward and the way be made smooth for the fall of Bapaume. . . . So Bapaume is ours. Years ago, and months ago, and weeks ago, I have travelled the road towards Bapaume from Amiens to Albert, from that city of the Falling Virgin, past the vast mine-crater of La Boisselle up to Pozières and beyond, and always I and comrades of mine have glanced sideways and smiled grimly at the milestones which said so many kilometres to Bapaume—and yet a world of strife to go. Now those stones will not stare up at us with irony. There is no longer a point on the road where one has to halt lest one should die. To-day I walked past the milestones—ten, seven, four, three, one—and then into Bapaume, and did not die, though to tell the truth death missed me only by a yard or two. I have had many strange and memorable walks in war, but none more wonderful than this, for really it was a strange way this road to Bapaume, with all the tragedy and all the courage of this warfare, and all the ugly spirit of it on every side. I walked through the highway of our greatest battles up from Pozières, past Courcelette, with Martinpuich to the right, past the ruins of Destremont Farm, and into the ruins of Le Sars. Thence the road struck straight towards Bapaume, with the grey pyramid of the Butte de Warlencourt on one side and the frightful turmoil of Warlencourt village on the other. I did not walk alone along this way through the litter of many battles, through its muck and stench and corruption under a fair blue sky, with wisps of white cloud above and the glitter of spring sunshine over all the white leprous landscape of these fields. Australian soldiers were going the same way—towards Bapaume. Some of them wore sprigs of shamrock in their buttonholes, and I remembered it was St. Patrick's Day. Some of them were gunners, and some were pioneers, and some were Generals and high officers, and they had the look of victory



Line on July 1, 1916

„ „ *March* 1, 1917

„ „ *March* 18, 1917

upon them and were talking cheerily about the great news of the day. It was in the neighbourhood of a haunted-looking place called "La Coupe-gueule," which means Cut-throat, once I imagine a farmstead or estaminet, that the road became the scene of very recent warfare—a few hours old or a few minutes. One is very quick to read how old the signs are by the look of the earth, by smells and sounds, by little, sure, alarming signs. Dead horses lay about—newly dead. Shell-craters with clean sides pock-marked the earth ten feet deep. Aeroplanes had crashed down, one of them a few minutes ago. A car came along and I saw a young pilot lying back wounded, with another officer smoking a cigarette, grave-eyed and pallid. Pools of red mud were on either side of the road, or in the middle of it. Everywhere in neighbouring ground hidden batteries were firing ceaselessly, the long sixty-pounders making sharp reports that stunned one's ears, the field-guns firing rapidly with sharp knocks. Up in the blue sky there was other gunning. Flights of our aeroplanes were up singing with a loud, deep, humming music as of monstrous bees. Our "Archies" were straffing a German plane, venturesome over our country. High up in the blue was the rattle of machine-gun fire. Down from Bapaume came a procession of stretcher-bearers with wounded comrades shoulder high, borne like heroes, slowly and with unconscious dignity, by these tall men in steel helmets. The enemy had ruined the road in several places with enormous craters, to stop our progress. They were twenty yards across, and very deep, and fearful pitfalls in the dark. Past the ruins of La Barque, past the ruins of Ligny-Thilloy and Thilloy, went the road to Bapaume. Behind me now on the left was Loupart Wood, the storm-centre of strife when I went up to it a few days ago, and Grevillers beside it, smashed to death, and then presently and quite suddenly I came into sight of Bapaume. It was only a few hundred yards away, and I could see every detail of its streets and houses. A street along the Bapaume road went straight into the town, and then went sharply at right angles, so that all the length of Bapaume lay in front of me. The sun was upon it, shining very bright and clear upon its houses. It was a sun-picture of destruction. Bapaume was still standing, but broken and burnt.

In the middle of Bapaume stood the remnant of the old clock-tower, a tower of brown brick, like the houses about it, but

broken off at the top, only two-thirds of its former height, and without the clock which used to tell us the time miles away when we gazed through teleseopes from distant observation-posts, when we still had miles to go on the way to Bapaume. On the right of the old tower the town was burning, not in flames when I entered, but with volumes of white smoke issuing slowly from a row of red villas already gutted by fires lighted before the Germans left.

A Colonel came riding out of Bapaume. He was carrying a big German beer-jug, and showed me his trophy, leaning down over his saddle to let me read the words :

Zum Feldgrauen Hilfe

" Is it pretty easy to get into Bapaume ? " I asked.

" Barring the heavy stuff," he said. " They're putting over shells at the rate of two or three a minute."

They were, and it was not pleasant, this walk into Bapaume, though very interesting.

It was when I came to an old farmhouse and inn—the shell of a place—on the left of the road (Duhamel-Equarriseur, Telephone No. 30) that I knew the full menace of this hour was above and about. The enemy was firing a great number of shells into Bapaume. They came towards us with that rushing, howling noise which gives one a great fear of instant death, and burst with crashes among the neighbouring houses. They were high explosives, but shrapnel was bursting high, with thunder-claps, which left behind greenish clouds and scattered bullets down. I went through the outer defences of Bapaume, walking with a General who was on his way to the town, and who pointed out the strength of the place. Lord ! It was still horribly strong, and would have cost us many lives to take by assault. Three belts of wire, very thick, stood solid and strong, in a wide curve all round the town. The enemy had dug trenches quite recently, so that the earth was fresh and brown, and dug them well and perfectly. Only here and there had they been broken by our shell-fire, though some of the dug-outs had been blown in.

Just outside Bapaume, on the south-east side, is an old citadel built centuries ago and now overgrown with fir-trees which would have given a great field of fire to German machine-gunners, and I went afterwards into snipers' posts, and stood at

the entrance of tunnels and bomb-proof shelters, not going down or touching any of the litter about because of the danger lurking there in dark entries and in innocent-looking wires and implements. There was a great litter everywhere, for the German soldiers had left behind large numbers of long-handled bombs and thousands of cartridges, and many tools and implements.

Before getting into Bapaume I crossed the railway line from Arras, through Biefvillers, which was now on fire. They had torn up the rails here, but there was still the track, and the signal-boxes and signs in German.

Im Bahnhof
Nur 10 Km.

That is to say, the speed of trains was to be only 10 kilometres an hour into the station.

Another signboard directed the way for "Vieh" and "Pferde" (cattle and horses), and everywhere there were notice-boards to trenches and dug-outs:

Nach 1 Stellung
Für zwei Offizieren

As I entered Bapaume I noticed first, if my memory serves, the Hôtel de Commerce, with "garage" painted on a shell-broken wall, and immediately facing me an old wooden house with a shoot for flour. Many of the houses had collapsed as though built of cards, with all their roofs level with the ground. Others were cut in half, showing all their rooms and landings, and others were gutted in ways familiar to English people after Zeppelin raids. Higher up on the right, as I have said, rows of red-brick villas were burnt out, and smoke was rising in steady volumes from this quarter of the town. The church, a white stone building, was also smouldering. There were no Germans in the town, unless men are still hiding there. The only living inhabitant was a little kitten which ran across the square and was captured by our patrols, who now have it as a pet.

There were other men living early in the morning, but they are now dead. It was a company of German machine-gunners who held out as the last rear-guard. They fired heavily at our men, but were quickly overpowered. The first message that came back from the entering troops was laconic:

"While entering Bapaume we came across a party the whole of which was accounted for. The mopping-up of Bapaume is now complete."

I did not stay very long in the town. It was not a health resort. High explosives were crumping every part of the town, and the buildings were falling. Pip-squeaks were flung about horribly, and when I came out with the General and another officer a flush of them came yelling at us and burst very close, flinging up the ground only a few yards away. The roadway of "pavé" had been hurled up in huge chumps of stone, and shrapnel was again breaking to the right of us. I struck across country eastwards to see the promised land, and on the way to the near ridge turned and stared back at Bapaume in the glow of the sunset. Ours at last!

The fires were still burning in the other villages, and it was such a scene of war as I saw first when Dixmude was a flaming torch and Pervyse was alight in the beginning of the world-conflict. . . . At about half-past nine that night the enemy fired several quick rounds from his field-batteries. Then there was a strange silence, unbroken by any shell-fire. The Germans had fired their last shot in the battles of the Somme.

X

THE RESCUE OF PÉRONNE

March 18

To-day at 7 a.m. a battalion of the Royal Warwicks of the 48th Division entered Péronne.

Standing alone that statement would be sensational enough. The French fought for Péronne desperately through more than two years of war, and now it is the luck of the British troops to enter it, as yesterday we entered Bapaume, after a short action with the enemy's rear-guards. But the news does not stand alone. The whole of the old German line south of Arras, strong as one vast fortress, built by the labour of millions of men, dug and tunnelled and cemented and timbered, with thousands of machine-gun redoubts, with an immense maze of trenches, protected by forests of barbed wire, had slipped away as though by a landslide, and the enemy is in rapid retreat to new lines some miles away. As he goes he is laying fire and

waste to the countryside. North-east of Bapaume, into which I went yesterday with our troops, and west of Péronne, scores of villages are burning. One of them, larger than a village, the town of Athies, is a flaming torch visible for miles around. Others are smouldering ruins, from which volumes of smoke are rolling up into the clear blue sky. Of all this great tract of France, which the enemy has been forced to abandon to avoid the menace of combined attack, there is no beauty left, and no homesteads, nor farms, but only black ruins and devastation everywhere. The enemy is adopting the full cruelty of war's malignancy. He has fouled the wells in his wake, so that if our soldiers' horses should drink there they will die. Over the water-ways he has burnt his bridges. Cross-roads have been mined, opening up enormous craters like those I saw yesterday outside Bapaume. High-explosive traps have been placed in the way of our patrols, to scatter them in fragments if they lack caution.

It is impossible to give our exact line at the present moment. We have no exact line. Village after village has fallen into our hands since midday yesterday. Our cavalry patrols are over the hills and far away. Our infantry patrols are pushing forward unto new territory, so that only aeroplanes know the exact whereabouts. As one aviator has reported:

"Our men are lighting fires and taking their dinners at places off the map. They are going into pubs which have been burnt out to find beer which is not there."

North and east of Bapaume our patrols have gone beyond the villages of Rocquenes, Bancourt, Favreuil, and Sapignies. Intelligence officers riding out on bicycles to these places were scared to find themselves so lonely, and believed that the enemy must be close at hand. But the enemy was still farther off. Our cavalry, working up past Logeast Wood, penetrated east of Acheit-le-Grand and turned the German line of Behagnies—Ytres.

Much farther south, in the neighbourhood of Nesle, French and British cavalry patrols came into touch to-day, and one of our aviators reports that he saw French civilians waving flags and cheering them.

The Germans have a cavalry screen behind their rear-guards. They were seen yesterday north of Bapaume and southwards beyond Roye. And some of them were chased by a British

airman at a place called Ennemain. He swooped low like an albatross, and brought a man off his horse by a machine-gun bullet. Others stampeded from this terrible bird.

This morning our troops were through Eterpigny beyond Barleux, and found the villages of Misery and Marchelepot. There was some fighting last night and this morning in the neighbourhood of Péronne. The enemy had snipers and machine-gunners about, and kept some of their batteries back until the last possible moment, flinging 5·9's and smaller shells over our side of the lines, and firing heavily until about ten o'clock. Then the gun-fire ceased, and there was not a shot. His guns were going back along the dark roads, his rear-guards moved away, leaving behind them their great defensive works of the Bapaume Ridge, and burning villages.

* * * *

MARCH 19

REFUSING to give battle, the enemy has retired still farther over open country east of Bapaume, and our cavalry patrols are in touch with his mounted rear-guards. The exact location is vague, as the movement continues, and our cavalry is in small units, moving cautiously between a large number of burning villages, which are everywhere alight. Small parties of the enemy were encountered last night in the open near Ytres and Berthincourt, and some snipers in an omnibus opened fire upon a cavalry patrol, and were scattered by an aeroplane which swooped low, sweeping them with machine-gun bullets.

South of the Somme our cavalry got in touch with German cavalry at Rouy and with German cyclists at Potte. All the bridges have been destroyed to cover the enemy's retreat, as at Rouy and Breuil, and all the wells have been filled with filth and rubbish.

It is a most extraordinary experience to follow up through this abandoned country from which the enemy has fled, as I have found to-day in tramping through the district of Péronne and into that deserted and destroyed town. A few weeks ago I went a journey to the new lines we had taken over from the French south of the Somme. Then it was under the full blast of shell-fire, and not a day passed without the enemy flinging high explosives into the ruined villages of Herbécourt, Estrées, Flaucourt, and Biaches. From Mont-St.-Quentin, on the flank of Péronne, he had the observation of all

our ground, so that it was horrible to see that hill staring down on one, and by daylight in the open country one moved always under the menace of death. To-day that menace had gone. The evil spell had lifted, and we moved freely in the sight of Mont-St.-Quentin, unafraid and with a strange sense of safety. He had gone from there yesterday morning, and, at the same time, had crept away from the trenches at Biaches, and across his wooded bridges to Péronne, and out of this town to the open country, hurrying through the night to escape from our pursuit.

I went down into Biaches, a wild chaos of trenches and dug-outs and ruin, and passed through the front line held by our troops until about 6.30 yesterday morning, and went with difficulty through the German barbed wire still uncut, so that we were tangled and caught in it. Then I passed into the old German lines, and went across the wooden causeway built by them over the marshes down to the bank of the Somme. On the other side of the river loop I saw for the first time Péronne, taken by the enemy in the autumn of 1914, and fought for furiously by the French, who regained it for a while and lost it again. It was dead quiet over there. No shell burst over it, but a little smoke rolled above its houses. From that distance, the broad river's width, it did not look much destroyed. It was only afterwards that I saw how much. Several wooden bridges spanned the Somme, and I tried two of these to get across, but there were great gaps which I could not jump. Before leaving the enemy had broken them and tried to hide the damage from the view of our airmen by putting up straw screens. All the trees in the marshes had been slashed by our shell-fire. Empty barrels floated in the water with broken boats, and the old barge, called Notre Dame d'Amiens, was blown in half. Snipers' posts had been built, outfacing our lines, and German ammunition and bombs and coiled wire and a great litter of timber lay about.

I managed at last to get into Péronne by a wide curve through the Faubourg de Paris, over the piled stones of a broken bridge with planks across the gaps put there by our soldiers so that the enemy could be followed in pursuit. He had been careful to check us as long as possible, though it was not very long, for an hour after his going the Royal Warwicks and some Londoners marched unto the Grande Place. Down the Faubourg de Paris all the trees had been cut down, so that they had crashed across

the street, making a great barricade. Before going, firebrands had been at work, setting alight all the houses not already smashed by shell-fire. They were burning, when I passed them, so fiercely that the hot breath of the flames was upon my face. Even now it was possible to see that Péronne had once been a little town of old-world dignity and charm. Frontages of some of these gutted houses were richly carved in Renaissance style, among them being the ruins of the Palais de Justice and the Hôtel de Ville and the Maison Municipale. Here and there along the Rue St.-Fursy and in the Grande Place was an old French mansion built before the Revolution, now just a skeleton of broken brickwork and timber. Though many houses were still standing enough to see they were houses, there was hardly one that had escaped the wrath of war. It was pitiful to see here and there old signs, showing the life of the town in peace, such as the " Librairie Nouvelle," the " Teinturerie Parisienne " belonging to Mme. Poitevineau, the Notary's house, full of legal books and papers scattered on a charred floor beneath a gaping roof, a shop for " articles de chasse " kept by one Monsieur Bourdin. Those signboards, reminding one of Péronne before the war, were side by side with other signboards showing the way of German life until 6.30 yesterday morning. At the entrance to the town is a notice : " Durchgang bei Tage streng Verboten."

Most houses are labelled, " Keller für 60 Mann." At the entrance to a dug-out below the town hall is the notice, " Verwundete und Kranke " (For wounded and sick). The only inhabitants of the Grande Place were a big black cat, looking sick and sorry for itself, and a dummy figure dressed as a French Zouave, sprawling below the pedestal of a statue to Catherine de Poix, heroine of the siege of 1870. The statue had been taken away, like that of Faidherbe in the square of Bapaume. On top of the pedestal had been laid the dummy figure in French uniform, but our soldiers removed it. Péronne was a dead town, like Ypres, like Bapaume, like all those villages in the wake of the German retreat. Over its old fortifications, built by Vauban, and over its marshes wild duck are flying.

PART II

ON THE TRAIL OF THE ENEMY

I

THE MAKING OF NO MAN'S LAND

MARCH 21

FOR several days now I have been going with our advancing troops into towns, villages, and country abandoned by the enemy in his retreat. It has been a strange adventure, fantastic as a dream, yet with the tragedy of reality. The fantasy is in crossing over No Man's Land into the German lines, getting through his wire, and passing through trenches inhabited by his soldiers until a day or two ago, travelling over roads and fields down which his guns and transport went, and going into streets and houses in which there are signs of his recent occupation. He has ruined all his roads, opening vast craters in them, and broken all his bridges, but our men have been wonderfully quick in making a way over these gaps, and this morning I motored over the German trenches at Roye, zigzagging over this maze of ditches and dug-outs by bridges of planks before getting to the roads behind his line.

After passing the area of shell-fire on our side and his, the field of shell-craters, the smashed barns and houses and churches, the tattered tree-trunks, the wide belts of barbed wire, one comes to country where grass grows again, and where the fields are smooth and rolling, and where the woods will be clothed with foliage when spring comes to the world again—country strange and beautiful to a man like myself, who has been wandering through all the filth and frightfulness of the Somme battlefields. German sentry-boxes still stand at the cross-roads. German notice-boards stare at one from cottage walls, or where

the villages begin. Thousands of coils of barbed wire lie about in heaps, for the enemy relied a great deal upon this means of defence, and in many places are piles of shells which he has not removed. Gun-pits and machine-gun emplacements, screens to hide his roads from view, observation-posts built in tall trees, remain as signs of his military life a mile or two back from his front lines, but behind the trenches are the towns and villages in which he had his rest billets, and it is in these places that one sees the spirit and temper of the men whom we are fighting. The enemy has spared nothing on the way of his retreat. He has destroyed every village in his abandonment with a systematic and detailed destruction. Not only in Bapaume and in Péronne has he blown up, or burnt, all the houses which were untouched by shell-fire, but in scores of villages he has laid waste the cottages of the peasants, and all their farms and all their orchards. At Réthonvillers this morning, to name only one village out of many, I saw how each house was marked with a white cross before it was gutted with fire. The Cross of Christ was used to mark the work of the Devil.

In Bapaume and Péronne, in Roye and Nesle and Liancourt, and all these places over a wide area, German soldiers not only blew out the fronts of houses, but with picks and axes smashed mirrors and furniture and picture-frames. As a friend of mine said, a cheap-jack would not give fourpence for anything left in Péronne, and that is true, also, of Bapaume. There is nothing but filth in those two towns; family portraits have been kicked into the gutters. I saw a picture of three children in Bapaume, and it was smeared with filth in the writing of a dirty word. The black bonnets of old women who once lived in those houses lie about the rubbish-heaps, and by some strange, pitiful freak are almost the only signs left of the inhabitants who lived here before the Germans wrecked their houses. The enemy has left nothing that would be good for dwelling or for food. Into the wells he has pitched filth so that the people may not drink.

But that is not the greatest tragedy I have seen. The ruins of houses are bad to see when done deliberately, even when shell-fire has spared them in the war zone. But worse than that is the ruin of women and children and living flesh. I saw that ruin to-day in Roye and Nesle. I was at first rejoiced to see how the first inhabitants were liberated after being so long

in hostile lines. I approached them with a queer sense of excitement, eager to speak with them, but instantly when I saw those women and children in the streets, and staring at me out of windows, I was struck with a chill of horror. The women's faces were dead faces, sallow and mask-like, and branded with the memory of great agonies. The children were white and thin—so thin that their cheek-bones protruded. Hunger and fear had been with them too long.

The Mayor of Nesle told me that after the first entry of the Germans on August 29, 1914, and after the first brutalities, the soldiers had behaved well, generally speaking. They were well disciplined, and lived on good terms with the people, as far as possible. Probably he tells the truth fairly, and I believe him. But the women with whom I spoke were passionate and hysterical, and told me other stories. I believe them too. Because these women, who are French, had to live with the men who were killing their husbands and brothers, and that is a great horror. They had to submit to the daily moods of men who were sometimes sulky and sometimes drunk. The officers were often drunk. They had to see their children go hungry, for though the Germans gave them potatoes, sometimes they took away the hens, so that there were no eggs, and the cows, so that there was no milk, and the children suffered and were thin. On October 5, 1914, the Kaiser came to Nesle with an escort of five motor-cars, and the soldiers lined the square and cheered him; but the women and children stared and were silent, and hated those white-haired men with the spiked hats. During the battles of the Somme many wounded passed through the town, and others came with awful stories of slaughter and fierce words against the English. Once twenty men of the 173rd Regiment came in. They were half mad, weeping and cursing, and said they were the sole survivors of their regiment.

Then, quite recently, there came the rumour of a German retreat. On Thursday, March 15, the German commandant sent for the Mayor and announced the news. He gave orders for all the inhabitants to leave their houses at 6.30, and to assemble in the streets, while certain houses and streets indicated were to be destroyed. The German commandant, whose name was Herwaardt, said he greatly regretted this necessity. The work was to be carried out by his Oberlieutenant Baarth. The

people wept at the destruction of their homes, though the houses in the centre of Nesle were spared. But they were comforted by the promise of liberation. For a week previously the enemy had been withdrawing his stores. The garrison consisted of about 800 to 1000 men of the 38th Regiment of Chasseurs and Cyclists. The gunners were the last to leave, and went away at midnight with the rear-guard of infantry. By half-past seven in the morning there was not a German soldier left in Nesle, and at half-past nine a British patrol entered, and the women and children surrounded our men, laughing and weeping. To-day they were being fed by British soldiers, and were waiting round the field-kitchens with wistful eyes.

II

THE LETTER OF THE LAW

MARCH 23

ON both sides cavalry patrols are scouting in the woods and villages, and for a few days at least the situation has been extraordinarily like those early days of the war in October of 1914, when our cavalry was operating in Flanders, feeling forward cautiously to test the enemy's strength. For the first time since those days German Uhlans have again been seen on the Western Front. They have been seen moving about the woods and on the skyline.

Little parties of them are in hiding behind the broken walls of villages destroyed in the German retreat. Now and again they bump into our advanced posts and then bolt away, not seeking a fight. These are the manœuvres of open warfare not seen on our Front since the trenches closed us in. Our cavalry patrols are working in the same way. Yesterday one of them encountered some of the enemy on the road to St.-Quentin and very close to that town, where fires are still burning. Our mounted men were suddenly called to a halt by a sharp fusillade of rifle and machine-gun bullets. The enemy this time was unmounted and entrenched, and after reconnoitring this position our patrol galloped back.

It is difficult to know always the exact whereabouts of the enemy's advanced posts, as they were scattered about the countryside without any definite trench line, so that officers of

corps and divisional staffs who are going out to examine the lie of the land, with a secret hope of finding an adventure on the way, are taking out revolvers, which have long been idle. I found a young staff officer to-day fastening his holster to his belt before starting out on his morning's expedition, and he slapped it and laughed, and said, "I haven't done this for over two years. It is quite like old times." It brings back reminiscences to me also of old days, when with two comrades I moved about the roads of war ignorant of the enemy's position and narrowly escaping his advance-guards. But, after all, it is no joke, and I should hate to get into the middle of an enemy patrol somewhere in this country of burnt and abandoned villages, through which I have been wandering with tired eyes in the sight of all this destruction, so wanton, so brutal, and so ruthless.

For the enemy has adopted the letter of the law in that code of cruelty which governs war, and I can think of nothing more damnable than the horror which came to some hundreds of poor souls, mostly women and children and old stricken men in the village of Rouy-le-Petit above the Somme.

Many of them had been driven into this hamlet from neighbouring villages, which the Germans set on fire. Huddled in the streets of Rouy, they saw the smoke and flames rising from their homesteads, and they were terrorized and crushed. Presently the last German rear-guard went out from Rouy, not cheering and singing as they came in August of 1914, but silent and grim, conscience-stricken also, it seemed, so the French people have told me, because of the law which made them do the things they had done. They had been friendly with the villagers before they smashed their houses, and had been good to the children before breaking their bedsteads and making them homeless. They said again and again in self-excuse, "It is war; it is the order of our high officers! We are bound to do it."

The German guns rumbled through the street of Rouy, and went away with gunners and cyclists and infantry. Night came, and all the noise of distant artillery died down, and there was hardly the sound of a shot over all the country where for nearly three years there has been the ceaseless fire of artillery. Early next morning a British patrol entered the village, and the people crowded round, clasping the soldiers'

hands and thanking God for deliverance, and telling of their hunger, which was near starving-point. Then the worst happened. Suddenly shells began to fall over the village, crashing through the roofs and flinging up the ground in the roadway. They were German shells fired by the German gunners who had left only a few hours before. They were not meant to kill the civilians who had been gathered at Rouy, all the women and children and old, weak men. They were meant to kill the British patrols, and so were lawful as an act of war. But one could not be done without the other, and there were civilians who were wounded in Rouy-le-Petit that day. Weeping and wailing, they rushed down into the cellars and took refuge there, while flights of shells followed and tore holes in rooms and walls, and filled the village with smoke and splinters. And that is the lawfulness of war and the horror of war.

When the enemy left he blew up all the cross-roads and made many mine-craters along the way of his retreat. They have scarcely checked us at all, and a tribute of praise is due to our infantry and our labour battalions, who have been repairing those roads with quick, untiring industry. To-day I have met with much traffic of war, French as well as British traffic, the men in blue marching by the men in brown through country where both armies meet. The French soldiers were marching with their bands and colours through the ruined villages, and I never saw more splendid men even in the early days of the war, when the great armies of France went forward with a kind of religious passion and flung back the Germans from the Marne. Our own men had no bands and no colours. There was not the same sense of drama as they passed, but these clean-shaven boys of ours, hardened by foul weather, by frost, and rain-storms, and blizzard, go forward into the great waste, which the enemy had left behind him, in their usual matter-of-fact way, whistling a tune or two, passing a whimsical word along the line, settling down to any old job that comes in a day's work, and finding as much comfort as they can at the end of a long day's march on the lee side of a shell-broken wall.

III

THE ABANDONED COUNTRY

March 24

After long days of tiring adventure in the wake of the German rear-guards, following through places only just evacuated, and tramping through the great ruin they have left behind them, I have tried to give some idea of the tragic drama of it all, the uncanny quietude of the abandoned country, the frightful wreckage of towns and villages destroyed, not by shell-fire, but by picks and axes and firebrands, the deep mine-craters blown under roads, the broken bridges across the Somme, the crowds of starved civilians surrounding our patrols in market squares, where they had been herded while their homes were in flames around them, the little bodies of British troops advancing through barbed-wire entanglements into fortress positions like Bapaume and Péronne, and our cavalry patrols feeling their way forward into unknown country where the enemy's rear-guards are in hiding.

That, in a few lines, is the historical picture of this strange new phase of warfare in which we have been pushing forward during the past two weeks. But through it all, to me, an onlooker of these things, there has been one special theme of interest. It is the revelation of the German way of life behind his lines—these abundant lines—his military methods of defence and observation and organization, and the domestic arrangements by which he has tried to make himself comfortable in the field of war. Along every step of the way by which he has retreated there are relics which show us exactly how our enemies lived and fought when they were hidden from us across No Man's Land, and their philosophy of life in war. All that is worth a little study.

Everywhere—outside Bapaume and Péronne and Chaulnes, and all those deserted places near the front lines—one ugly thing stares one in the face: German barbed wire. It is heavier, stronger stuff than ours or the French, with great cross-pieces of iron, and he has used amazing quantities of it in deep wide belts in three lines of defence before his trench systems, and in all sorts of odd places, by bridges and roads and villages even

far behind the trenches, to prevent any sudden rush of hostile infantry or to tear our cavalry to pieces should we break his lines and get through. His trenches were deeply dug, and along the whole line from which he has now retreated they are provided with great concreted and timbered dug-outs leading into an elaborate system of tunnelled galleries perfectly proof from shell-fire, and similar to those which I have described often enough in the Somme battlefields. As a builder of dug-outs the German soldier has no equal. But in addition to these trench systems he made behind his lines a series of strong posts cunningly concealed and commanding a wide field of fire with dominating observation over our side of the country.

I found such a place quite by accident yesterday. My car broke down by a little wood near Roye looking across to Damery and Bouchoir, and the woody, wired fields which till a week ago were No Man's Land. When I strolled into the wood I suddenly looked down an enormous sand-pit covering an acre or so, and saw that it was a concealed fortress of extraordinary strength and organization—an underground citadel for a garrison of at least 8000 men perfectly screened by the wood above. Into the sand-banks on every side of the vast pit were built hundreds of chambers leading deeper down into a maze of tunnels which ran right round the central arena. Before leaving the enemy had busied himself with an elaborate packing up, and had taken away most of his movable property, but the "fixtures" still remained, and a litter of mattresses stuffed with shavings, empty wine-bottles, candles which had burnt down on the last night in the old home, old socks and old boots and old clothes no longer good for active service, and just the usual relics which people leave behind when they change houses.

The officers' quarters were all timbered and panelled and papered, with glass windows and fancy curtains. They were furnished with bedsteads looted from French houses, and with mirrors, cabinets, washhand-stands, marble-top tables, and easy chairs. The cross-beams of the roofs were painted with allegorical devices and with legends such as "Gott mitt uns," "Furchtlos und treu," "In Treue fest."

Each room had an enamelled or iron stove, so that the place must have been snug and warm, and I noticed in several of them empty cages from which singing birds had flown when German officers opened the doors before their own flitting.

The men's quarters were hardly less comfortable, and the whole place was organized as a self-contained garrison, with carpenters' shops and blacksmiths' sheds, and a quartermaster's stores still crowded with bombs and aerial torpedoes—thousands of them, which the enemy had left behind in his hurry—and kitchens with great stoves and boilers, and a Red Cross establishment for first aid, and concrete bath-houses with shower-baths and cigar-racks for officers, who smoke before and after bathing. Outside the artillery officers' headquarters was a board painted in white letters, with the following couplet:

Schnell und gut ist unser Schuss
Deutscher Artilleristen Gruss.

(Quick and good is our shooting
Of the German gunners' greeting.)

Shell-craters in the open arena showed the French gunners had returned the greeting, and that the garrison of this citadel had done well to arrange their life mainly as a subterranean existence. But at times when the French guns were quiet and when the French sun was shining they had built alfresco corners with garden seats and tables, round which enormous stacks of wine-bottles were littered, showing, as I have seen in all these abandoned places, the enormous quantity of drink consumed by German officers in their lighter moments.

This citadel in the wood is only one out of similar strong points all along the lines now abandoned by the enemy. Péronne, with Mont-St.-Quentin on its flank, and with the Somme winding around it, and with forests of barbed wire in the marshes below it, could be called impregnable if any place may defy great armies. It was wonderfully fortified with great industry and great skill for over two years, and walking into these places now, marvelling at their strength, I can only ask one question, which certainly the enemy will find it hard to answer. Why has he abandoned such formidable strongholds? It seems to me that there is only one answer. It is because they had to go and not because they wanted to go. It was because they have no longer the strength to hold their old line against the growing gun-power and the growing man-power of the British Armies, and have been compelled to attempt a new strategy which will save their reserves and shorten their line.

Behind the lines the German officers and men lived comfortably in French billets, and organized amusements for battalions in rest. At Bapaume they had a little theatre with painted scenery. Two of the wings were among the few things left in the rubbish-heaps of that poor destroyed town, burnt and sacked by the Germans before they left, and when I went in there with our troops some Australian soldiers propped them up against the walls of a gutted house and inscribed upon them in white chalk the name "Maison de la Co-ee," inviting their comrades to walk up and see the finest show on earth. In Nesle the Germans turned the Café de Commerce into their casino, and played military bands, whose music did not cheer the hearts of wan women whose children were starving.

Strange fellows! Who knows what to make of them? The French people just liberated from their rule, which was a reign of terror in the severity of its official regulations, contradict themselves in expressing their white-hot hatred of the German character and their liking for the individual soldiers who were quartered on them.

"They were kind to the children . . . but they burnt our houses."—"Karl was a nice boy. He cried when he went away. . . . But he helped to smash up the neighbours' furniture with an axe."—"The lieutenant was a good fellow . . . but he carried out the orders of destruction."

A woman told me, with a quivering rage in her voice, that a German officer rode his horse into her room one day. Another woman showed me the cut down her hand and arm which she had received from a German soldier who tried to force his way into her house at night. Other stories have been told me by women white with passion. . . . Yet it is clear that, on the whole, the Germans behaved in a kindly, disciplined way until those last nights, when they laid waste so many villages and all that was in them.

IV

THE CURÉ OF VOYENNES

MARCH 25

IN the village of Voyennes, not far from Ham, and one of the few hamlets not utterly destroyed, because the people of the district were herded here while their own houses were being burnt, I went into the ruins of the church. It was easy to see how the flames had licked about its old stones, scorching them red, and how the high oak roof had come blazing down before the walls and pillars had given way. Everything had been licked down by flame except one figure on an encalcined fragment of wall. Only one hand of the Christ there had been burned, and the body hanging on the Cross was unscathed, like so many of those Calvaries which I have seen in shell-fired places.

But this place had not been touched by shell-fire, for it had been far beyond the range of French or British guns; it had been destroyed wilfully. The village around had been spared because of the large number of people driven into it from the neighbouring countryside, and when I called upon the priest who lives opposite the ruin of the church, where he served God and the people of his little parish, I heard the story of its burning.

It was a queer thing to me to sit to-day in that room of the French presbytery talking to the old Curé. Just a week before, on Sunday, at the very hour of my visit, which was at midday, that old church outside the window had become a blazing torch, and this priest, who loved it, had wept tears as hot as its flames, and in his heart was the fire of a great agony. He sat before me, a tall old man of the aristocratic type, with a finely chiselled face, but thin and gaunt, and as sallow as though he had been raised from the dead. If I could put down his words as he spoke them to me with passion in his clear, vivid French, with gestures of those transparent hands which gave a deeper meaning to his words, it would be a great story, revealing the agony of the French people behind the German lines. For the story of this village of Voyennes is just that of all the villages on the enemy's side of the barbed wire.

Here in a few little streets about an old church were the

bodily suffering, the spiritual torture, the patient courage, the fight against despair, the brooding but hidden fears, which have been the life over a great tract of France since August 1914. "For a year," said M. le Curé Caron, "my people here have had not a morsel of meat and not a drop of wine, and only bad water in which the Germans put their filth. They gave us bread which was disgusting, and bad haricots and potatoes, and potatoes and haricots, and not enough even, so that the children became wan and the women weak. The American people sent us some food-stuffs, but the Germans took the best of them, and in any case we were always hungry. But those things do not matter, those physical things. It was the suffering of the spirit that mattered, and, monsieur, we suffered mentally so much that it almost destroyed our intelligence, it almost made us silly, so that even now we can hardly think or reason, for you will understand what it meant to us French people. We were slaves after the Germans came in and settled down upon us, and said, 'We are at home; all here is ours.' They ordered our men to work, and punished them with prison for any slight fault. They were the masters of our women, they put our young girls among their soldiers, they set themselves out deliberately at first to crush our spirit, to beat us by terror, to subdue us to their will by an iron rule. They failed, and they were astonished. 'We cannot understand you people,' they said; 'you are so proud, your women are so proud.' And that was true, sir. Some women, not worthy of the name of French women, were weak—it was inevitable, alas!—but for the most part they raised their heads and said, 'We are French, we will never give in to you, not after one year, nor two years, nor three years, nor four years.'

"The Germans asked constantly, 'When do you think the war will end?' We answered, 'Perhaps in five years, but in the end we will smash you,' and this made them very angry, so our people went about with their heads up, scornful, refusing to complain against any severity or any hardship.

"Secretly among ourselves it was different. We could get no news for months except lies. We knew nothing of what was happening. Starvation crept closer upon us. We were surrounded by the fires of hell. As you see, we are in the outer section of the great Somme battle line, and very close to it.

For fifty hours at a time the roar of guns swept round us week after week, and month after month, and the sky blazed around us. We were afraid of the temper of the German officers after the defeat on the Marne, and after the battles of the Somme Germany was like a wounded tiger, fierce, desperate, cruel. Secretly, though our people kept brave faces, they feared what would happen if the Germans were forced to retreat. At last that happened, and after all we had endured the days of terror were hard to bear. From all the villages around, one by one, people were driven out, young women and men as old as sixty were taken away to work for Germany, and an orderly destruction began, which ended with the cutting down of our orchards and ruin everywhere. The Commandant before that was a good man and a gentleman, afraid of God and his conscience. He said, 'I do not approve of these things. The world will have a right to call us barbarians.' He asked for forgiveness because he had to obey orders, and I gave it him. An order came to take away all the bells of the churches and all the metal-work. I had already put my church bells in a loft, and I showed them to him, and said, 'There they are.' He was very sorry. This man was the only good German officer I have met, and it was because he had been fifteen years in America and had married an American wife and escaped from the spell of his country's philosophy. Then he went away. Last Sunday, a week ago, at this very hour when the people were all in their houses under strict orders, and already the country was on fire with burning villages, a group of soldiers came outside there with cans of petroleum, which they put into the church. Then they set fire to it, and watched my church burn in a great bonfire. At this very hour a week ago I watched it burn. . . . That night the Germans went away through Voyennes, and early in the morning, up in my attic, looking through a pair of glasses I saw four horsemen ride in. They were English soldiers, and our people rushed out to them. Soon afterwards came some Chasseurs d'Afrique, and the Colonel gave me the news of the outer world to which we now belong after our years of isolation and misery. Our agony had ended. . . . The Germans know they were beaten, monsieur; a Commandant of Ham said, 'We are lost.' After the battles of the Somme the men groaned and wept when they were sent off to the Front. 'God,' they cried, 'the horror of the French and English gun-fire; O

Christ, save us!' During the battles of the Somme the wounded poured back, a thousand or more a day, and Ham was one great hospital of bleeding flesh. The German soldiers have bad food and not enough of it, and their people are starving as we starved. The German officers behaved to their men with their usual brutality. I have seen them beat the soldiers about the head while those men stood at attention, not daring to say a word, but as soon as the officers are out of the way, the men say, 'We will cut those fellows' throats after the war. We have been deceived! After the war we will make them pay.'"

So the Curé talked to me, and I have only given a few of his words, but what I have given is enough.

V

THE CHÂTEAU OF LIANCOURT

MARCH 28

DAY by day our soldiers push farther forward across the country which the Germans have laid waste, so that even when peace comes there will be no dwelling-places where there were once fine châteaux of France, and thriving little towns and hamlets clustering about old farmsteads, and great barns; nor any orchards, where for miles there was white blossom in the Aprils of many centuries, and ruddy fruit in all the autumns of the past.

These men of ours take all this desolation in a matter-of-fact way, as they take everything in this war, and pass almost without thought scenes more than usually fantastic in piled ruins, and it is only by some such phrase or two as "Did you ever see the like?" or "They've made a pretty mess of that!" that they express their astonishment in this wide belt of death which the enemy has left along his tracks. Secretly I think some of them are stirred with a sense of the sinister drama of it all, and are a little staggered by a ruthlessness of war beyond even their own earlier experience, which covers the battle of the Somme. All this is something new, something which seems unnecessary, something more devilish, and our men go poking about among the burnt houses and into the German underground defences searching among the rubbish and examining

the relics of the old life there, as though to discover the secret of the men who have gone away, the secret of "Old Fritz" their enemy.

Sometimes they find messages written to them by the enemy in good English, but with dark meanings. In one German dug-out the other day an officer of ours found a note scribbled on the table.

"We are going away, Tommy dear, and leave some empty bottles of Rhein wine. It is the best wine in the world. Take care it is not the best for you."

"When are they coming?" was another note. "Enlist at once, Tommy my boy."

But those things do not explain. It is difficult to find any clue to the character of these German soldiers, who have left behind them proofs of wonderful labour and skill, and proofs of great sentiment and religious piety, and proofs of an ordered cruelty worse than anything seen in France since barbarous days. How can one explain?

Yesterday I went to a village called Liancourt. There is a big château there. Even now at a little distance it seems a place of old romance, with a strong, round tower and high peaked roofs, and great wings of dark old brick. In such a place Henri IV lived. It was centuries old when the Revolution made its heraldic shields meaningless, but until a year or two ago its walls were still hung with tapestries, and its halls were filled with Empire furniture, and its great vaulted cellars with wine. When the Germans came they made it a hospital for their wounded—their Red Cross is still painted on one of the sloping roofs—and though it was far behind their lines, surrounded it with barbed wire which is now red with rust, and built enormous dug-outs in its grounds in case French guns should ever come near. When the Germans went a few days ago they left but an empty shell. They stripped the walls of panelling and tapestry, they took all the clocks and pictures and furniture and carpets, and I wandered yesterday through scores of rooms empty of everything so that my footsteps echoed in them. The Château of Liancourt had been looted from attic to cellar. But quite close to the château the Germans have left the bodies of many of their soldiers, as all over this country, by

roadsides and in fields, there are the graves of German dead. Here there was one of their cemeteries, strongly walled with heavy blocks of stone, each grave with its big wooden headpiece, with a stone chapel built for the burial service, and with a "Denkmal," or monument, in the centre of all these dead. It was a memorial put up by Hessian troops in July 1915 to the honour of men taken on the field of honour.

In this graveyard one sees the deep respect paid by the Germans to the dead—French dead as well as German dead. . . . But just a hundred yards away is another graveyard. It is the cemetery of the little church in the grounds of the château, and is full of vaults and tombs where lay the dust of French citizens, men, women, and children, who died before the horror of this war.

The vaults had been opened by pickaxes. The tombstones were split across and graves exposed. Into these little houses of the dead—a young girl had lain in one of them—rubbish had been flung. From one vault the coffin had been taken away. . . . The church had been a little gem, with a tall, pointed spire. Not by shell-fire, but by an explosive charge placed there the day before the Germans went away the spire had been flung down and one end of the church blown clean away. The face of its clock lay upon the rubbish-heap. The sanctuary had been opened and the reliquaries smashed. The statues of the saints had been overturned, and the vestments of the priest trampled and torn.

I went into the village of Crémery not far away. Here also the graves had been opened in the churchyard, and in the church the relics of saints had been looted—a queer kind of loot for German homes—and in the sacristy fine old books of prayer and music lay tattered on the floor.

I went again yesterday to the great area of destroyed villages which the enemy left behind him on his retreat to St.-Quentin, and from Holnon Wood, which our cavalry were the first to enter a few weeks ago, looked across the open country between our outposts and that old city whose cathedral rises as a grey mass above the last ridge, so near and so clear when the sunlight falls upon it that our men can see the tracery of the windows. It still stands unbroken and beautiful, though houses have been destroyed around it to clear the enemy's field

of fire. German officers use its towers as observation-posts, and can see every movement of our men in the fields below.

"They snipe us with five-point-nines," said a young officer, smoking a cigarette, with his back to a broken wall in a heap of ruins. "They scatter 'em about on the off-chance of hitting some one, and you never can tell where they are likely to drop."

Some of them came whirring across to the Holnon Wood and down into the village of Francilly as I stood looking across to Savy Wood, but not close enough to hurt any one. It is the queerest thing to be in this part of our Front. Go a little too far down a road, mistake one village for another—and it is quite easy, for they all look alike in ruin—and if you are an absent-minded man you can get into the enemy's lines without realizing your danger. Yesterday only occasional shell-bursts and short spasms of machine-gun fire from the edge of Savy Wood came to prove that here masses of men are watching out to kill each other. Pigeons cooed in the woods. The ground at my feet was spangled with anemones, and the sunlight chased shadows across the fields of spring below the city, where soon the streets may be noisy with battle. Our men, living amidst ruin this side of St.-Quentin, have settled down to this life of open warfare as though they had known nothing else. Whether the tragedy of it all sinks into them I do not know, but they whistle music-hall tunes in the vast rubbish-heaps which were once old châteaux of France, and sleep and stack their rifles in ancient crypts among the coffins of French aristocrats who died before, or just a little after, the French Revolution, and find shelter from wind and rain in poor little sacristies filled with statues of saints adjoining churches wrecked by explosive charges before the German soldiers went their way.

One sees the strangest contrasts of life and death in all this countryside, as when yesterday I came across a Highlander playing his pipes in a wild and merry way on an avalanche of old red bricks which once formed part of the mansion of Caulaincourt, with many terraces lined with white statues of Greek goddesses now lying maimed and mutilated among the great rubbish-heaps.

By the roadside on my way I saw some English soldiers resting, and close to them was a marble tablet stuck up in a

heap of earth. I read the words carved on the stone, and it told me that here was the heart of Anne-Joséphine Barandier, Marquise de Caulaincourt, who died in Paris on January 17, 1830.

Poor dead heart of Madame la Marquise! In a vault near by all the tablets of her family had been smashed, and the coffins laid bare, but there was no little niche to show where the lady's heart had been.

Outside in the churchyard there was a great tomb to the memory of the French soldiers who fell in 1871, and next to them the graves of German soldiers killed in this war, and a wooden cross to Second Lieutenant Nixon, of the Royal Flying Corps, killed here behind the German lines on July 19, 1915.

VI

THE OLD WOMEN OF TINCOURT

MARCH 29

ONE scene on the roadside of war will remain sharp in my memory among all these scenes in the wilderness which the Germans have made behind them, through which I have been passing. It is because of the courage of old women who sat there on the way.

It was beyond Péronne, and through the open country where our cavalry patrols are working, and in the village of Tincourt. Up beyond Lagnicourt the guns yesterday were firing heavily, and sharp gusts of wind blew forward the noise of a greater and farther bombardment, deep and low. Quite close, the village of Roisel, taken by our troops the day before, was still smouldering, and all around for miles was the long black trail of war with hundreds of villages and farmsteads laid low by fire and dynamite before the Germans left them in retreat. But in Tincourt only the outer streets and the neighbouring, separate buildings had been destroyed. The main part of the village was still standing, though the enemy had shelled it a little the day before. When I came into it I saw that it was one of the few places left by the Germans, because it was a concentration camp of civilians driven in from other villages while they were being smashed.

The people were gathered about the roadway, about two

hundred of them, sitting or standing among piles of bundles, like refugees in the old days of the war. There were many old, old women among them in black dresses and bonnets, and a group of young girls, of fifteen or so, and small boys and children in arms. They were looking down the road anxiously, and I found that they were waiting for British lorries and ambulances to take them away to safer country, beyond the reach of German shell-fire. They were people who had just been liberated from hostile rule. The grey tide of the German army had swept back from them, and they found themselves once again free people of France, with news of France, and of the world on the other side of the trenches and the wire which for two years and a half had shut them in with the enemy.

I spoke with the old women, these brave old grandmothers who were sitting homeless and houseless on their bundles in the midst of a ruined countryside, within reach of the guns. They were not weeping but smiling. They were not afraid but scornful of the perils through which they had passed.

They were thin because they had stinted for their grandchildren, and they had suffered great misery, but they held their old grey heads high, and said, "For our sons' sake we endured all things."

They are the grandmothers of the babes who know nothing of all this war, and one day will be told, and the mothers of men who have fought and died, and who fight and die with supreme self-sacrifice in the shambles of this war. They are women worthy of hero sons, themselves heroic. They were not passionate against the enemy, only contemptuous of him, and of his rule of them. They liked some of the German soldiers and made no accusations of individual brutality, but cursed the spirit which had laid waste their villages, and destroyed their houses and orchards, and taken away their young girls and all men to the age of fifty. They spoke with the dispassionate eloquence of people who have been in earthquakes and shipwrecks and tornadoes. German cruelty was natural, inevitable, and unarguable, and the soldiers who had done these things were the slaves of the fate which ordained their acts.

"I was taken to Roisel from my own village farther back," said one old lady. "They burnt my house and my neighbours'

houses and drove us forward. Roisel was all in flames when we passed through. The fires came out of the houses, and the heat of them scorched us. Then we came to Tincourt, and yesterday they shelled us. The little ones were afraid. Our young girls were weeping and full of terror.

"You will understand that it is hard to see one's village destroyed, and to see one's sisters taken away, and not to know what is to happen next. For us old women it was not so bad. We are too old to weep, having wept too much. We thought of our sons who have died for France. We showed our scorn for the enemy by hiding our fear."

"They know they are beaten," said the old ladies. "They ask always for peace. They are afraid of the punishment which God holds in store for them for all this wickedness."

"Yes," said one of the old women, "they will be punished. What we have suffered they will suffer. All this"—she thrust up a skinny hand towards the ruined land behind her—"must be paid for."

"It is William who will pay," said another old woman, "with his head."

It was like the talk of the Greek Fates, the three old women who held the thread and spun the thread and snipped the thread—this talk of the old women of Tincourt, so passionless, so hard, so fair, so certain. But I marvelled at their courage, sitting there on their bundles, after tramping away from their blazing homesteads, waiting for British lorries to take them away from a place which, even then, was registered by German guns, with the young girls, and the babies who were born under hostile rule.

VII

THE AGONY OF WAR

MARCH 31

I AM moved to write again of the old men and women and of the young women and children who have been liberated by our advance, because I have just been among these people again, seeing their tears, hearing their pitiful tales, touched by hands which plucked my sleeve so that I should listen to another story of outrage and misery.

All they told me, and all I have seen, builds up into a great tragedy. These young girls, who wept before me, shaken by the terror of their remembrance, these old brave men, who cried like children, these old women who did not weep but spoke with strange, smiling eyes as to life's great ironies, revealed to me in a fuller way the enormous agony of life behind the German lines now shifted back a little so that these people have escaped. It is an agony which includes the German soldiers, themselves enslaved, wretched, disillusionized men, under the great doom which has killed so many of their brothers, ordered to do the things many of them loathe to do, brutal by order even when they have gentle instincts, doing kind things by stealth, afraid of punishment for charity, stricken both by fear and hunger.

"Why do you go?" they were asked by one of the women who have been speaking to me.

"Because we hope to escape the new British attacks," they answered. "The English gun-fire smashed us to death on the Somme. The officers know we cannot stand that horror a second time."

They spoke as men horribly afraid.

"I was the bailiff of Mme. la Marquise de Caulaincourt," said an elderly man, taking off his peaked cap to show me a coronet on the badge. "When the Germans came first to our village they seized all the tools, and all the farm-carts, and all the harvesting, and then they forced us all to work for them, the men at three sous an hour, the women at two sous an hour, and prison for any who refused to work. From the château they sent back the tapestries, the pictures, and anything which pleased this Commandant or that, until there was nothing left. Then in the last days they burnt the château to the ground and all the village and all the orchards."

"It was the same always," said a woman. "There were processions of carts covered with linen, and underneath the linen was the furniture stolen from good houses."

"Fourteen days ago," said an old man who had tears in his eyes as he spoke, "I passed the night in the cemetery of Vraignes. There were one thousand and fifteen of us people from neighbouring villages, some in the church and some in

the cemetery. They searched us there and took all our money. Some of the women were stripped and searched. In the cemetery it was a cold night and dark, but all around the sky was flaming with the fire of our villages—Pœuilly, Bouvincourt, Marteville, Trefçon, Monchy, Bernes, Hancourt, and many more. The people with me wept and cried out loud to see their dear places burning and all this hell. Terrible explosions came to our ears. There were mines everywhere under the roads. Then Vraignes was set on fire and burnt around us, and we were stricken with a great terror. Next day the English came when the last Uhlans had left. 'The English!' we shouted, and ran forward to meet them, stumbling, with outstretched hands. Soon shells began to fall in Vraignes. The enemy was firing upon us, and some of the shells fell very close to a barn quite full of women and children. 'Come away,' said your English soldiers, and we fled farther."

Russian prisoners were brought to work behind the lines, and some French prisoners. They were so badly fed that they were too weak to work.

"Poor devils!" said a young Frenchwoman. "It made my heart ache to see them."

She watched a French prisoner one day through her window. He was so faint that he staggered and dropped his pick. A German sentry knocked him down with a violent blow on the ear. The young Frenchwoman opened the window, and the blood rushed to her head.

"Sale bête!" she cried to the German sentry.

He spoke French and understood, and came under the window.

"'Sale bête'? . . . For those words you shall go to prison, madame."

She repeated the words, and called him a monster, and at last the man spoke in a shamed way and said:

"Que voulez-vous? C'est la guerre. C'est cruelle, la guerre!"

This man had kinder comrades. Pitying the Russian prisoners, they gave them stealthily a little brandy and cigarettes, and some who were caught did two hours' extra drill each day for a fortnight.

"My three sisters were taken away when the Germans left," said a young girl. She spoke her sisters' names, Yvonne,

Juliette, and Madeleine, and said they were eighteen and twenty-two and twenty-seven, and then, turning away from me, wept very bitterly.

"They are my daughters," said a middle-aged woman. "When they were taken away I went a little mad. My pretty girls! And all our neighbours' daughters have gone, up from sixteen years of age, and all the men-folk up to fifty. They have gone to slavery, and for the girls it is a great peril. How can they escape?"

How can one write of these things? For the women it was always worst. Many of them had surpassing courage, but some were weak and some were bad. The bad women preyed on the others in a way so vile that it seems incredible. There was no distinction of class or sex in the forced labour of the harvest-fields, and delicate women of good families were forced to labour on the soil with girls strong and used to this toil. There were many who died of weakness and penumonia and under-feeding.

"Are you not afraid of being called barbarians for ever?" asked a woman of a German officer who had not been brutal, but, like others, had tried to soften the hardships of the people.

"Madame," he said very gravely, "we act under the orders of people greater than ourselves, and we are bound to obey, because otherwise we should be shot. But we hate the cruelty of war, and we hate those who have made it. One day we will make them pay for the vile things we have had to do."

What strange little dramas, what tragic stories I have heard in these recent days! I have told the tale of one old priest. Here is the tale of another, as he told it to me in the midst of ruin.

He is the Abbé Barbe, of Muille, near Ham. In the neighbourhood was an enemy, too, a Frenchman, who was once a Christian brother, and now, unfrocked, a drunkard and a debauchee. He accused the abbé of having a telephone in his cellar from which he sent messages to Paris about German military secrets. One night there came a bang at the door of the abbé's study. Five soldiers entered with fixed bayonets and arrested the old priest. He was taken to the fortress of Ham and put into a dark cell with one small iron grating and a plank bed. Here he was interrogated by a German officer, who told him of the grave accusation against him.

"Search my cellars," said the abbé. "If there is a telephone there, shoot me as a spy. If not, set me free, after your court martial."

There was no court martial. After four days in the darkness the abbé was taken away by German soldiers and set down, not at Muille, but at Voyennes, ten kilometres or so away, and forbidden to go back to his village or his church. He went back a few days ago, when the Germans left. When he went into his house he found that it had been sacked. All the rare old books in his library had been burnt. There was nothing left to him.

"Sir," said a sister of charity, "these people whom you see here were brave but tortured in spirit and in body. Beyond the German lines they have lived in continual fear and servitude. The tales which they have told us must make the good God weep at the wickedness of his creatures. There will be a special place in hell, perhaps, for the Emperor William and his gang of bandits."

She spoke the words as a pious aspiration, this little pale woman with meek and kindly eyes, in her nun's dress.

VIII

CAVALRY IN ACTION

April 2

Our troops have advanced since yesterday on to a line of high ground overlooking St.-Quentin and sweeping in a curve round the wood of Holnon, which is the last strong point between us and the trenches immediately before the cathedral city. This morning our outposts were in Bihucourt and Villecholles, and advancing to Maissemy, thereby holding all the roads except one on the western side of the Hindenburg—Siegfried line between Péronne and St.-Quentin. Our enemy is shelling the villages from which he has lately retired with long-range guns, and we are now drawing very close to his new line of trenches and fixed positions.

Northwards of Péronne and east of Bapaume our troops have taken Doignies, above the forest of Havrincourt, and hold Neuville and Ruyaulcourt to the south of it, so that this great wood is encircled like that of Holnon; and the enemy must

escape quickly from the shelter of the trees or be trapped there.

Northwards again, above Bapaume, we have made to-day a heavy and successful attack south-east of Croisilles, where a few days ago there was sharp fighting and several German counter-attacks, because the position threatens that sector of the Hindenburg line which is immediately behind the village striking down at an angle south-eastwards in front of Quéant, from which we are three miles distant. Two small villages below Croisilles, named Longatte and Ecoust-St.-Mien, have also fallen to us.

Our attack to-day was preceded by great gun-fire, and the enemy has defended himself with desperate courage, acting upon Hindenburg's orders that the position must be held at all costs. We have brought back over a hundred prisoners, and have inflicted great losses upon the garrison.

One of the most interesting and extraordinary features in all the fighting east of Bapaume has been the work of our cavalry squadrons in reconnaissance and attack. I confess that, after two and a half years of trench warfare, I was utterly sceptical of the value of mounted troops, in spite of the little stunt (as they called it) south of High Wood, after we took the Bazentins and Longueval in July of last year, when the Royal Dragoons and Deccan Horse rode out and brought back prisoners. Conditions have changed since then by a great transformation scene, owing to the enemy's abandonment of his old fortress positions on the Somme under our frightful onslaught of gun-fire. The country into which we have now gone is beyond the great wide belt of shell-craters, which made the battlefields of the Somme a wild quagmire of deep pits and ponds. The roads between the ruined villages are wonderfully smooth and good where they have not been mined, and the fields are as nature and French husbandry left them after last year's harvest. Then there has been a glorious absence of heavy shell-fire while the enemy has been drawing back his guns to emplacements behind the Hindenburg line; and this to cavalry, as well as to infantry, makes all the difference between heaven and hell. So the cavalry has had its chance again after the old far-off days when they rode up the Mont des Cats and chased Uhlans through Meteren, and scouted along the Messines Ridge in the autumn of 1914.

There have been no great sensational episodes, no shock of lance against lance in dense masses, no cutting up of rear-guards nor slashing into a routed army, but there has been a great deal of good scouting work during the past three weeks. Eight villages have been taken by the Canadian cavalry under General Seely, and they have captured a number of prisoners and machine-guns. They have liked their hunting. I have seen the Indian cavalry riding across the fields with their lances high, and it was a great sight, and as strange as an Arabian Nights tale in this land of France, to see those streams of brown-bearded men, as handsome as fairy-book princes, with the wind blowing their khaki turbans.

Night after night our cavalry have gone out in patrols, the leader ahead and alone; two men following; behind them a small body keeping in touch. They ride silently like shadows, with no clatter of stirrup or chink of bit. They find the gaps in the enemy's wire, creep close to his infantry outposts, ride very deftly into the charred ruins of abandoned villages, and come back with their news of the enemy's whereabouts. A week ago one of their patrols went into the Forest of Holnon, which is still held by the enemy, and listened to Germans talking. Our men were undiscovered. They took the villages by sweeping round on both sides in a great gallop, with their lances down, and the enemy fled at the first sight of them.

When the cavalry charged at Equancourt, a body of British infantry, who had come on to the ground six hours earlier than they need have done, in order (as they said) not to miss the show, cheered them on with the wildest enthusiasm.

"Look at those beggars," shouted one man as the cavalry swept past; "that's the way to take a village. No blighted bombs for them, and hell for leather all the way!"

It was a difficult operation, this taking of Equancourt, and was carried out in the best cavalry style according to the old traditions. The village and a little wood in the front of it were held by Germans with machine-guns, and another village to the right named Sorel was defended in the same way, and commanded the field of fire before Equancourt. The cavalry had two spurs of ground in front of them divided by two narrow gullies, or re-entrants. One gully ran straight to the village of Equancourt, but was directly in front of the German machine-gun emplacements. The other gully was to the right,

and it was through this that the cavalry rode, sweeping round in a curve to Equancourt. Before their charge of two parties, a third party was posted on the left on rising ground, and swept the wood below Equancourt with machine-gun fire, and a smaller body of cavalry to the right occupied the attention of the enemy in Sorel in the same way. Then the two attacking parties were launched, and rode hard at a pace of twenty-three miles an hour.

The enemy did not stand. After a few bursts of machine-gun fire, which only hit a few of our mounted men, they fled behind the shelter of a railway embankment beyond the village, and most of them escaped.

All this is an interlude between greater and grimmer things. We have not yet come to the period of real open warfare, but have only passed over a wide belt of No Man's Land: and the fantasy of cavalry skirmishes and wandering Germans and civilians greeting us with outstretched hands from ruined villages will soon be closed by the wire and walls of the Hindenburg line, where once again the old fortress and siege warfare will begin, unless we have the luck to turn it or break through before the Siegfried divisions have finished their fortifications.

PART III

THE BATTLE OF ARRAS

I

ARRAS AND THE VIMY RIDGE

APRIL 9

TO-DAY at dawn our armies began a battle which, if Fate has any kindness for the world, may be the beginning of the last great battles of the war. Our troops attacked on a wide front including the Vimy Ridge—that grim hill which dominates the plain of Douai and the coalfields of Lens—and the German positions around Arras. In spite of bad fortune in the weather at the beginning of the day, so bad that there was no visibility for the airmen, and our men had to struggle forward in a heavy rain-storm, the first attacks have been successful, and the enemy has lost much ground, falling back in retreat to strong rear-guard lines where he is now fighting desperately.

The line of our attack covers a front of some twelve miles southwards from Givenchy-en-Gohelle, and is a sledge-hammer blow threatening to break the northern end of the Hindenburg line, already menaced round St.-Quentin. As soon as the enemy was forced to retreat from the country east of Bapaume and Péronne, in order to escape a decisive blow on that line, he hurried up divisions and guns northwards to counter our attack there, while he prepared a new line of defence known as the Wotan line, as the southern part of the Hindenburg line, which joins it, is known as the Siegfried position, after two great heroes of old German mythology. He hoped to escape there before our new attack was ready, but we have been too quick for him, and his own plans were frustrated. So to-day began another titanic conflict which

the world will hold its breath to watch, because of all that hangs upon it.

I have seen the fury of this beginning, and all the sky on fire with it, the most tragic and frightful sight that men have ever seen, with an infernal splendour beyond words to tell. The bombardment which went before the infantry assault lasted for several days, and reached a great height yesterday, when coming from the south I saw it for the first time. I went up in darkness long before light broke to-day to watch the opening of the battle. It was very cold, with a sharp wind blowing from the south-east and rain-squalls. The roads were quiet until I drew near to Arras, and then onwards there was the traffic of marching men going up to the fighting-lines, and of their transport columns, and of many ambulances. In darkness there were hundreds of little red lights, the glow of cigarette ends. Every now and then one of the men would strike a match, holding it in the hollow of his hands and bending his head to it, so that his face was illumined—one of our English faces, clear-cut and strong. The wind blew sparks from cigarette ends like fireflies. Outside one camp a battalion was marching away, a regiment of shadow-forms, and on the bank above them the band was playing them out with fifes and drums, such a merry little tune, so whimsical and yet so sad also in the heart of it, as it came trilling out of darkness. On each side of me as I passed by men were deeply massed, and they were whistling and singing and calling out to each other. Away before them were the fires of death, to which they were going very steadily, with a tune on their lips, carrying their rifles and shovels and iron rations, while the rain played a tattoo on their steel hats.

I went to a place a little outside Arras on the west side. It was not quite dark, because there was a kind of suffused light from the hidden moon, so that I could see the black mass of the cathedral city, the storm-centre of this battle, and away behind me to the left the tall, broken towers of Mont-St.-Eloi, white and ghostly looking, across to the Vimy Ridge. The bombardment was now in full blast. It was a beautiful and devilish thing, and the beauty of it and not the evil of it put a spell upon one's senses. All our batteries, too many to count, were firing, and thousands of gun-flashes were winking and blinking from the hollows and hiding-places, and all their

shells were rushing through the sky as though flocks of great birds were in flight, and all were bursting over German positions, with long flames which rent the darkness and waved sword-blades of quivering light along the ridges. The earth opened, and pools of red fire gushed out. Star-shells burst magnificently, pouring down golden rain. Mines exploded east and west of Arras, and in a wide sweep from Vimy Ridge to Blangy southwards, and voluminous clouds, all bright with a glory of infernal fire, rolled up to the sky. The wind blew strongly across, beating back the noise of guns, but the air was all filled with the deep roar and the slamming knocks of single heavies and the drum-fire of field-guns.

The first attack was at 5.30. Officers were looking at their wrist-watches as on a day in July last year. The earth lightened. In rank grass, looking white and old, scrubs of barbed wire were black on it. A few minutes before 5.30 the guns almost ceased fire, so that there was a strange, solemn hush. We waited, and pulses beat faster than second-hands. "They're away," said a voice by my side. The bombardment broke out again with new and enormous effects of fire and sound. The enemy was shelling Arras heavily, and black shrapnel and high explosives came over from his lines. But our gun-fire was twenty times as great. Around the whole sweep of his lines green lights rose. They were signals of distress, and his men were calling for help. It was dawn now, but clouded and storm-swept. A few airmen came out with the wind tearing at their wings, but they could see nothing in the mist and driven rain. I went down to the outer ramparts of Arras. The eastern suburb of Blangy was already in our hands. On the higher ground beyond our men were fighting forward. I saw two waves of infantry advancing against the enemy's trenches, preceded by our barrage of field-guns. They went in a slow, leisurely way, not hurried, though the enemy's shrapnel was searching for them.

"Grand fellows," said an officer lying next to me on the wet slope. "Oh, topping!"

Fifteen minutes afterwards groups of men came back. They were British wounded and German prisoners. They were met on the roadside by medical officers, who patched them up there and then before they were taken to the field-hospitals in ambulances. From these men, hit by shrapnel and machine-

gun bullets, I heard the first news of progress. They were bloody and exhausted, but claimed success.

"We did fine," said one of them. "We were through the fourth lines before I was knocked out."

"Not many Germans in the first trenches," said another, "and no real trenches either, after our shelling. We had knocked their dug-outs out, and their dead were lying thick, and living ones put their hands up."

There were Tanks in action. Some of the men had seen them crawling forward over the open country, and then had lost sight of them. In the night the enemy had withdrawn all but his rear-guard posts to the trenches farther back, where he resisted fiercely with incessant machine-gun fire. The enemy's trench system south of Arras was enormously strong, but our bombardment had pounded it, and our men went through to the reserve support trench, and then on to the chain of posts in front of the Hangest Trench, which was strongly held, and after heavy fighting with bombs and bayonets to the Observatory Ridge, from which for two years and a half the enemy has looked down, directing the fire of his batteries against the French and British positions. Our storm troops in this part of the line were all men of the old English county regiments—Norfolks, Suffolks, Essex, Berkshires, Sussex, Middlesex, Queen's, Buffs, and Royal West Kents of the 12th Division. There was fierce fighting in Tilloy, to the south of Arras, by the Suffolks, Shropshire Light Infantry, and Royal Welsh Fusiliers of the 3rd Division, and afterwards they were held up by machine-gun fire from two formidable positions called the "Harp" and "Telegraph Hill," the former being a fortress of trenches shaped like an Irish harp, the latter rising to a high mound. These were taken by English troops and the Scots of the 15th Division, with the help of Tanks, which advanced upon them in their leisurely way, climbed up banks and over parapets, sitting for a while to rest and then waddling forward again, shaking machine-gun bullets from steel flanks, and pouring deadly fire into the enemy's positions, and so mastering the ground.

North of the Scarpe (north-east of Arras) the whole system of trenches was taken; and north again, along the Vimy Ridge, the Canadians and Highlanders of the 51st Division achieved a heroic success by gaining this high dominating ground,

which was the scene of some of the fiercest French battles in the first part of the war, and which is a great wall defending Douai. It was reckoned up to noon to-day that over 3000 prisoners had been taken. They are streaming down to prisoners' camps, and to our men who pass them on the roads they are the best proofs of a victorious day.

Those of us who knew what would happen to-day—the beginning of another series of battles greater perhaps than the struggle of the Somme—found ourselves yesterday filled with a tense, restless emotion. Some of us smiled with a kind of tragic irony, because it was Easter Sunday. In little villages behind the battle lines the bells of French churches were ringing gladly because the Lord had risen; and on the altar steps priests were reciting the old words of faith, "Resurrexi et adhuc tecum sum! Alleluia!" The earth was glad yesterday. For the first time this year the sun had a touch of warmth in it—though patches of snow still stayed white under the shelter of the banks—and the sky was blue, and the light glinted on wet tree-trunks and in the furrows of the new-ploughed earth. As I went up the road to the battle lines I passed a battalion of our men—the men who are fighting to-day—standing in a hollow square with bowed heads, while the chaplain conducted the Easter service. It was Easter Sunday, but no truce of God. I went to a field outside Arras, and looked into the ruins of the cathedral city. The cathedral itself stood clear in the sunlight, with a deep black shadow where its roof and aisles had been. Beyond was a ragged pinnacle of stone—the once glorious town hall and a French barracks—and all the broken streets going out to the Cambrai road. It was hell in Arras, though Easter Sunday. The enemy was flinging high explosives into the city, and clouds of shrapnel burst above, black and green. All around the country, too, his shells were exploding in a scattered, aimless way, and from our side there was a heavy bombardment all along the Vimy Ridge, above Neuville-St.-Vaast, and sweeping round above St.-Nicholas and Blangy, two suburbs of Arras, and then south-west of the city on the ridge above the road to Cambrai. It was one continuous roar of death, and all the batteries were firing steadily. I watched our shells burst, and some of them were monstrous, raising great lingering clouds above the German lines.

There was one figure in this landscape of war who made some

officers about me laugh. He was a French ploughman who upholds the tradition of war. Zola saw him in 1870, and I have seen him on the edge of the other battlefields; and here he was again driving a pair of sturdy horses and his plough across the sloping field—not a furlong away from the town where the German shells were raising rosy clouds of brick-dust. So he gave praise to the Lord on Easter morning, and prepared the harvests which shall be gathered after the war.

All behind the front of battle was a great traffic, and all that modern warfare means in the organization and preparation of an enormous operation was here in movement.. I had just come from our outpost lines down south from the silence of that great desert which the enemy has left in the wake of his retreat, east of Bapaume and Péronne, and from that open warfare with village fighting, where small bodies of our infantry and cavalry have been clearing the countryside of rear-guard posts. Here, round about Arras, was the concentration for the old form of battle attack upon entrenched positions, fortified hills and strong natural fortresses, defended by massed guns as before the battles of the Somme. For miles on the way to the front were great camps, great stores, and restless activity everywhere. Supply columns of food for men and guns moved forward in an endless tide. Transport mules passed in long trails. Field-batteries went up to add to the mass of metal ready to pour fire upon the German lines. It was a vast circus of the world's great war, and everything that belongs to the machinery of killing streamed on and on. Columns of ambulances for the rescue, and not for that other side of the business, came in procession, followed by an army of stretcher-bearers, more than I have ever seen before, marching cheerily as though in a pageant. In some of the ambulances were Army nurses, and men marching on the roads waved their hands to them, and they laughed and waved back. In the fields by the roadsides men were resting, lying on the wet earth, between two spells of a long march or encamped in rest, the same kind of men whom I saw on July 1 of last year, some of them the same men—our boys, clean-shaven, grey-eyed, so young-looking, so splendid to see. Some of them sat between their stacked rifles writing letters home. And the tide of traffic passed them and flowed on to the edge of the battlefields, where to-day they are fighting.

APRIL 10

THE enemy has lost already nearly 10,000 prisoners and more than half a hundred guns, and in dead and wounded his losses are great. He is in retreat south of the Vimy Ridge to defensive lines farther back, and as he goes our guns are smashing him along the roads. During the night the Canadians gained the last point, called Hill 145, on the Vimy Ridge, where the Germans held out in a pocket with machine-guns, and this morning the whole of that high ridge, which dominates the plains to Douai, is in our hands, so that there is removed from our path the high barrier for which the French and ourselves have fought through bloody years. Yesterday before daylight and afterwards I saw this ridge of Vimy all on fire with the light of great gun-fire. The enemy was there in strength, and his guns were answering ours with a heavy barrage of high explosives. This morning the scene was changed as by a miracle. Snow was falling, blown gustily across the battlefields, and powdering the capes and helmets of our men as they rode or marched forward to the front. But presently sunlight broke through the storm-clouds and flooded all the countryside by Neuville-St.-Vaast and Thélus and La Folie Farm, up to the crest of the ridge, where the Canadians and Highlanders of the 51st Division had just fought their way with such high valour. Our batteries were firing from many hiding-places, revealed by short, sharp flashes of light, but few answering shells came back, and the ridge itself, patched with snowdrift, was quiet as any hill of peace. It was astounding to think that not a single German stayed up there out of all those who had held it yesterday, unless some poor wounded devils still cower in the deep tunnels which pierce the hill-side. It was almost unbelievable to me, who have known the evil of this high ridge month after month and year after year, and the deadly menace which lurked about its lower slopes. Yet I saw proof below, where all Germans who had been there at dawn yesterday, thousands of them, were down in our lines, drawn up in battalions, marshalling themselves, grinning at the fate which had come to them and spared their lives.

The Canadian attack yesterday was astoundingly successful, and carried out by high-spirited men, the victors of Courcelette in the battles of the Somme, who had before the advance an

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Stanford's Geog.l Estab.t London.

utter and joyous confidence of victory. On their right were the Highland Brigades of the 51st Division who fought at Beaumont-Hamel, and who shared the honour of that day with the Canadians, taking as many prisoners and gaining a great part of the ridge. They went away at dawn, through the mud and rain which made scarecrows of them. They followed close and warily to the barrage of our guns, the most stupendous line of fire ever seen, and by 6.30 they had taken their first objectives, which included the whole front-line system of German trenches above Neuville-St.-Vaast, by La Folie Farm and La Folie Wood, and up by Thélus, where they met with fierce resistance. The German garrisons were for the most part in long, deep tunnels, pierced through the hill as assembly ditches. There were hundreds of them in Prinz Arnault Tunnel, and hundreds more in Great Volker Tunnel, but as the Canadians and Scots surged up to them with wave after wave of bayonets German soldiers streamed out and came running forward with hands up. They were eager to surrender, and their great desire was to get down from Vimy Ridge and the barrage of their own guns. That barrage fell heavily and fiercely upon the Turco Trench, but too late to do much damage to our men, who had already gone beyond it. The Canadian casualties on the morning of attack were not heavy in comparison with the expected losses, though, God knows, heavy enough, but the German prisoners were glad to pay for the gift of life by carrying our wounded back. The eagerness of these men was pitiful, and now and then grotesque. At least the Canadian escorts found good laughing matter in the enormous numbers of men they had to guard and in the way the prisoners themselves directed the latest comers to barbed-wire enclosures, and with deep satisfaction acted as masters of the ceremony to their own captivity. I have never seen such cheerful prisoners, although for the most part they were without overcoats and in a cold blizzard of snow. They were joking with each other, and in high good humour, because life with all its hardships was dear to them, and they had the luck of life. They were of all sizes and ages and types. I saw elderly, whiskered men with big spectacles, belonging to the professor tribe, and young lads who ought to have been in German high schools. Some of their faces looked very wizened and small beneath their great shrapnel helmets. Many of them

looked ill and starved, but others were tall, stout, hefty fellows, who should have made good fighting men if they had any stomach for the job. There were many officers standing apart. Canadians took over two hundred of them, among whom were several forward observing officers, very bad tempered with their luck, because the men had not told them they were going to bolt and had left them in front positions. All officers were disconcerted because of the cheerfulness of the men at being taken. I talked with a few of them. They told me of the horrors of living under our bombardment. Some of them had been without food for four days, because our gun-fire had boxed them in.

"When do you think the war will end?" I asked one of them.

"When the English are in Berlin," he answered, and I think he meant that that would be a long time.

Another officer said, "In two months," and gave no reason for his certainty.

"What about America?" I asked one of them. He shrugged his shoulders, and said, "It is bad for us, very bad; but, after all, America can't send an army across the ocean."

At this statement Canadian soldiers standing around laughed loudly, and said, "Don't you believe it, old sport. We have come along to fight you, and the Yankees will do the same."

By three o'clock in the afternoon the Canadians and the Highland Brigades had gained the whole of the ridge except the high strong post on the left of Hill 145, captured during the night. Our gun-fire had helped them by breaking down all the wire, even round Heroes' Wood and Count's Wood, where it was very thick and strong. Thélus was wiped utterly off the map. This morning Canadian patrols pushed in a snow-storm through Farbus Wood, and established outposts on the railway embankment. Some of the bravest work was done by forward observing officers, who climbed to the top of Vimy Ridge as soon as it was captured, and through the heavy fire barrages reported back to the artillery all the movements seen by them in the country below.

In spite of the wild day, our flying men were riding the storm and signalling to the gunners who were rushing up their field-guns. "Our 60-pounders," said a Canadian Officer, "had the day of their lives." They found many targets. There were

trains moving in Vimy village and they hit them. There were troops massing on sloping ground and they were shattered. There were guns and limber on the move, and men and horses were killed."

Above all the prisoners taken yesterday by the English, Scottish, and Canadian troops the enemy's losses were frightful, and the scenes behind his lines must have been hideous in slaughter and terror. On the right of Arras there was hard and costly fighting in Blangy and Tilloy and onwards to Feuchy. On this side the Germans fought most fiercely, and the Shropshires, Suffolks, Royal Fusiliers, and Welsh Fusiliers of the 3rd Division were held up near Feuchy Chapel and other strong points until our gun-fire knocked out these works and made way for them. Fifty-four guns were taken here on the east side of Arras, and to-day the pursuit of the beaten enemy continues.

II

LONDONERS THROUGH THE GERMAN LINES

THE Londoners' attack at dawn was one of the splendid episodes of the battle. They went through the German lines in long waves, and streamed forward like a living tide, very quick and very far, taking a thousand prisoners on their way through Neuville-Vitasse and Mercatel. Later in the day they were held up in their right flank by enfilade fire, as the troops on their right were in difficulties against uncut wire and machine-guns, and from that time onwards the London men of the 56th Division had perilous hours and hard, costly fighting. They were forced to extend beyond their line on the left to join up the gap between themselves and the troops to their north, and to work down with bombing parties on the right to gain ground in which the Germans were holding out desperately and inflicting many casualties on our men. In the centre the 56th Division was ordered to attack fortified villages from which machine-gun bullets swept the ground and where our assault was checked by stout belts of wire with unbroken strands. It was in those hours on April 9 and 10 that many young London men showed the highest qualities of spirit, risking death, and worse than death, with most desperate gallantry.

A young subaltern of the Middlesex Regiment saw those wire traps in the centre of Neuville-Vitasse, and led the way to them with a party of bombers and Lewis-gunners, smashed them up, and jumped on the machine-guns beyond. It opened the gate to all the other Londoners—Kensingtons, Rangers, and London Scottish—who swept through this village and beyond. Many officers fell, but there was always some one to take command and lead the men—a sergeant with a cool head, a second lieutenant with a flame in his eyes.

It was a boy of nineteen who took command of one company of the Middlesex Regiment when he was the only one to lead. He had never been under fire before, and had never seen all this blood and horror. He was a slip of a fellow, who had been spelling out fairy-tales ten years ago, which is not far back in history. Now, he led a company of fighting men, who followed him as a great captain all through that day's battle, and from one German line to another, and from one village to another, until all the ground had been gained according to the first plan. This gallant boy was afterwards reported missing, and his comrades believe that he was killed.

It was a battle of second lieutenants of London, owing to the heavy casualties of commanding officers. One of them was wounded in the head early in the day, but led his men until hours later he fell and fainted. Another young officer went out with three men in the darkness, when the infantry was held up by serious obstacles, and under heavy fire brought back information which saved many lives and enabled the whole line to advance.

There was a second lieutenant of the London Rangers who behaved with a quick decision and daring which seemed inspired by something more than sound judgment. The enemy was holding out in a trench and sweeping men down with that death-rattle of bullets which is the worst thing in all this fighting. In front of them was uncut wire, which is always a trap for men. Our London lieutenant did not go straight ahead. He flung his platoon round to the flank, smashed through the wire here, and sprang at the German gun-team with a revolver in one hand and a bomb in the other. The whole team was destroyed except one man, who fell wounded, and above those dead bodies the second lieutenant waved his revolver to his men and said, "Let's get on."

The London men went on for nine days, which is like ninety years on such a battlefield. They went on until they were checked and held by the enemy, who had time to rush up strong reserves and bring up new weight of guns. But they smashed through the Cojeul Switch and broke the Hindenburg line at Héninel.

Shell-fire increased hour by hour. From many hidden places machine-guns poured bullets across the ground. German snipers lay out in shell-holes picking off our men. This sniping was intolerable, and a second lieutenant and sergeant crawled out into No Man's Land to deal with it. They dragged three snipers out of one hole, and searched others and helped to check this hidden fire. One London rifleman went forward to kill a machine-gun with its hideous tat-tat-tat. It was a bolder thing than St. George's attack on the dragon, which was a harmless beast compared with this spitfire devil. The rifleman armed himself with a Lewis gun, carried at his hip, and fired so coolly that he scattered the German team and captured the gun.

All through those nine days, and afterwards in a second spell worse than those, the London men lived under great fire, those that had the luck to live, and though their nerves were all frayed with the strain of it, and they suffered great agonies and great losses, they never lost courage and kept their pride—London Pride.

One medical officer's orderly never tired of searching for stricken men, and seemed to have some magic about him, with shells bursting everywhere round about his steps and bullets spitting on each side of him. He organized stretcher-bearer parties, gave some of his own magic to them, and saved many lives. A captain of the R.A.M.C. went out under heavy fire and dressed the wounds of men lying there in agony and brought them back alive. A London private remained out looking after the wounded in an exposed place, and in his spare time saved other men attacked by small parties of Germans, by killing nine of them and taking one man prisoner. Another second lieutenant, one of those boys who have poured out the blood of youth upon these battlefields, took two Vickers guns with their teams through two barrages—only those who have seen a barrage can know the meaning of that—and by great skill and cunning brought his men through without

a single casualty, so that the infantry followed with high hearts.

Out of a burning billet and out of an exploding ammunition dump, a transport driver brought out some charges urgently needed for the battle. A man who entered a cage of tigers to draw their teeth would not want greater nerve than this.

When the blinds were drawn across the windows of many little London houses, when dusk crept into Piccadilly Circus and shadows darkened down the Strand, when the great old soul of London slept a while in the night, these boys who had gone out from her streets were fighting, and are fighting still, in the greatest battle of the world, and as they lie awake in a ditch, or wounded in a shell-hole, their spirit travels home again, through the old swirl of traffic, to quiet houses where already, perhaps, there is the scent of may-blossom.

III

THE STRUGGLE ROUND MONCHY

April 11

This morning our men advanced upon the villages of Monchy-le-Preux and La Bergère, on each side of the Cambrai road, beyond the ruins of Tilloy-les-Mofflaines, and occupied them after heavy fighting. British cavalry were first into Monchy, riding through a storm of shrapnel, and heavily bombarded in the village so that many of their horses were killed and many men wounded.

I saw the whole picture of this fighting to-day, and all the spirit and drama of it. It was a wonderful scene, not without terror, and our men passed through it alert and watchful to the menace about them. Going out beyond Arras through suburbs which were in German hands until Monday last—they had scribbled their names and regiments on broken walls of strafed houses, and men of English battalions who captured them had scrawled their own names above these other signatures—I came to the German barbed wire which had protected the enemy's lines, and then into three systems of trenches which had been the objectives of our men on the morning when the battle of Arras began. Here was Hangest Trench, in which

the enemy had made his chief resistance, and Holt Redoubt and Horn Redoubt, where his machine-guns had checked us, and a high point on the road to Tilloy, to which a Tank had crawled after a lone journey out of Arras to sweep this place with machine-gun fire, so that our men could get on to the village. It is no wonder that the Germans lost this ground, and that those who remained alive in their dug-outs surrendered quickly, as soon as our men were about them. The effect of our bombardment was ghastly. It had ploughed all this country with great shell-craters, torn fields of barbed wire to a few tattered strands, and smashed in all the trenches to shapeless ditches.

Tilloy still had parts of houses standing, bits of white wall having no relation to the wild rubbish-heaps around. The Germans had torn up the rails to make barricades, and had used farm carts, ploughs, and brick-heaps as cover. But they could have given no protection when the sky rained fire and thunderbolts. Dead bodies lay about in every shape and shapelessness of death. I passed into Devil's Wood—well named, because here there had been hellish torture of men—and so on to Observatory Ridge and ground from which, not far away, I looked into Monchy and across the battlefields where our men were fighting then. The enemy was firing heavy shells. They fell thick about Monchy village and on the other side of the Cambrai road, roaring horribly as they came and flinging up volumes of black earth and mud. The enemy's gunners were scattering other shells about, but in an aimless way, so that they found no real target, though they were frightening, especially when some of these crumps spattered one with mud.

Flights of British aeroplanes were on the wing, and German aeroplanes tried to fight their way over our lines. I saw several with the swish of machine-gun bullets and the high whining shells of British "Archies" about them. I have never before seen so great a conflict in the skies. It was a battle up there, and as far as I could see we gained a mastery over the enemy's machines, though some of them were very bold.

On the earth it was open warfare of the old kind, for we were beyond the trenches and our men were moving across the fields without cover. Some of our machine-gunners were serving their weapons from shell-holes, and the only protection of the head-quarters staff of the cavalry was a shallow ditch in the centre

of the battlefield sheltered by a few planks, quite useless against shell-fire, but keeping off the snow, which fell in heavy wet flakes. There the officers sat in the ditch, shoulder to shoulder, studying their maps and directing the action while reports were called down the funnel of a chimney by an officer who had been out on reconnaissance.

"It is villainously unhealthy round here," said this officer, who spoke to me after he had given his news to the cavalry general. He looked across to Monchy, and said, "Old Fritz is putting up a stiff fight." At that moment a German crump fell close, and we did not continue the conversation.

Across the battlefield came stretcher-bearers, carrying the wounded shoulder high, and the lightly wounded men walked back from Monchy and Guémappe very slowly, with that dragging gait which is bad to see. I spoke to a wounded officer and asked him how things were going.

"Pretty hot," he said, and then shivered and said, "but now I feel cold as ice."

Snow fell all through the afternoon, covering the litter of battle and the bodies of all our dead boys, giving a white beauty even to the ugly ruins of Tilloy and changing the Devil's Wood by enchantment to a kind of dream-picture. Through this driving snow our guns fired ceaselessly, and I saw all their flashes through the storm, and their din was enormous. Away in front of me stretched the road to Cambrai, the high road of our advance. It seemed so easy to walk down there—but if I had gone farther I should not have come back.

In a hundred years not all the details of this battle will be told, for to each man in all the thousands who are fighting there is a great adventure, and they are filled with sensations stronger than drink can give, so that it will seem a wild dream—a dream red as flame and white as snow.

For this amazing battle, which is bringing to us tides of prisoners and many batteries of guns, is being fought on spring days heavy with snow, as grim as sternest winter except when in odd half-hours the sun breaks through the storm-clouds and gives a magic beauty to all this whiteness of the battlefields and to trees furred with bars of ermine and to all the lacework of twigs ready for green birth. Now as I write there is no sun, but a darkness through which heavy flakes are falling. Our soldiers are fighting through it to the east of Arras, and

their steel helmets and tunics and leather jerkins are all white as the country through which they are forcing back the enemy.

While the battle was raging on the Vimy heights English and Scottish troops of the 15th, 12th, and 3rd Divisions were fighting equally fiercely, with more trouble to meet round about Arras. Beyond the facts I have already written there are others that must be recorded quickly, before quick history runs away from them.

Some day a man must give a great picture of the night in Arras before the battle, and I know one man who could do so—a great hunter of wild beasts, with a monocle that quells the human soul and a very "parfit gentil knight," whose pen is as pointed as his lance. He spent the night in a tunnel of Arras before getting into a sap in No Man's Land before the dawn, where he was with a "movie man," an official photographer (both as gallant as you will find in the Army), and a machine-gunner ready for action. Thousands of other men spent the night before the battle in the great tunnels, centuries old, that run out of Arras to the country beyond, by Blangy and St.-Sauveur. The enemy poured shells into the city, which I watched that night before the dawn from the ramparts outside, but in the morning they came up from those subterranean galleries and for a little while no more shells fell in Arras, for the German gunners were busy with other work, and were in haste to get away. The fighting was very fierce round Blangy, the suburb of Arras, where the enemy was in the broken ruins of the houses and behind garden walls strongly barricaded with piled sand-bags. But our men smashed their way through and on. Troops of those old English regiments were checked a while at strong German works known as the Horn, Holt, Hamel, and Hangest positions, and at another strong point called the Church Work. It was at these places that the Tanks did well on a day when they had hard going because of slime and mud, and after a journey of over three miles from their starting-point knocked out the German machine-guns, and so let the infantry get on. Higher north at a point known as Railway Triangle, east-south-east of Arras, where railway lines join, Gordons, Argylls, Seaforths, and Camerons of the 15th Division were held back by machine-gun fire. The enemy's works had not been destroyed by our bombardment, and our barrage had

swept ahead of the troops. News of the trouble was sent back, and presently back crept the barrage of our shell-fire, coming perilously close to the Scottish troops, but not too close. With marvellous accuracy the gunners found the target of the Triangle and swept it with shell-fire so that its defences were destroyed. The Scots surged forward, over the chaos of broken timber and barricades, and struggled forward again to their goal, which brought them to Feuchy Well, and to-day much farther. A Tank helped them at Feuchy Chapel, cheered by the Scots as it came into action scorning machine-gun bullets. The Harp was another strong point of the enemy's which caused difficulty to King's Own Liverpools, the Shropshire Light Infantry, Royal Fusiliers, East Yorks, Scottish Fusiliers, and Royal Scots, as I have already told, on the first day of battle, and another Tank came up, in its queer, slow way, and the gallant men inside served their guns like a Dreadnought, and so ended the business on that oval-shaped stronghold.

So English and Scottish troops pressed on and gathered up thousands of prisoners. "So tame," said one of our men, "that they ate out of our hands." So ready to surrender that a brigadier and his staff who were captured with them were angry and ashamed of men taken in great numbers without a single wounded man among them. Fifty-four guns were captured on this eastern side of Arras, and six were howitzers, and two of these big beasts were taken by cavalry working with the troops. Some of the gunners had never left their pits after our bombardment became intense four days before, and were suffering from hunger and thirst. Trench-mortars and machine-guns lay everywhere about, in scores, smashed, buried, flung about by the ferocity of our shell-fire. German officers wearing Iron Crosses wept when they surrendered. It was their day of unbelievable tragedy. A queer thing happened to some German transport men. They were sent out from Douai to Fampoux. They did not know they were going into the battle zone. They drove along until suddenly they saw British soldiers swarming about them. Six hours after their start from Douai they were eating bully-beef on our side of the lines, and while they munched could not believe their own senses. Our troops treated them with the greatest good humour, throwing chocolates and cigarettes into their enclosures and crowding round to speak to men who knew the English tongue. There seemed no kind of

hatred between these men. There was none after the battle had been fought, for in our British way we cannot harbour hate for beaten enemies when the individuals are there, broken and in our hands. Yet a little farther away the fighting was fierce, and there was no mercy on either side.

APRIL 12

IN spite of the enemy's hard resistance and the abominable weather conditions which cause our troops great hardships, we are making steady progress towards the German defensive positions along the Hindenburg line.

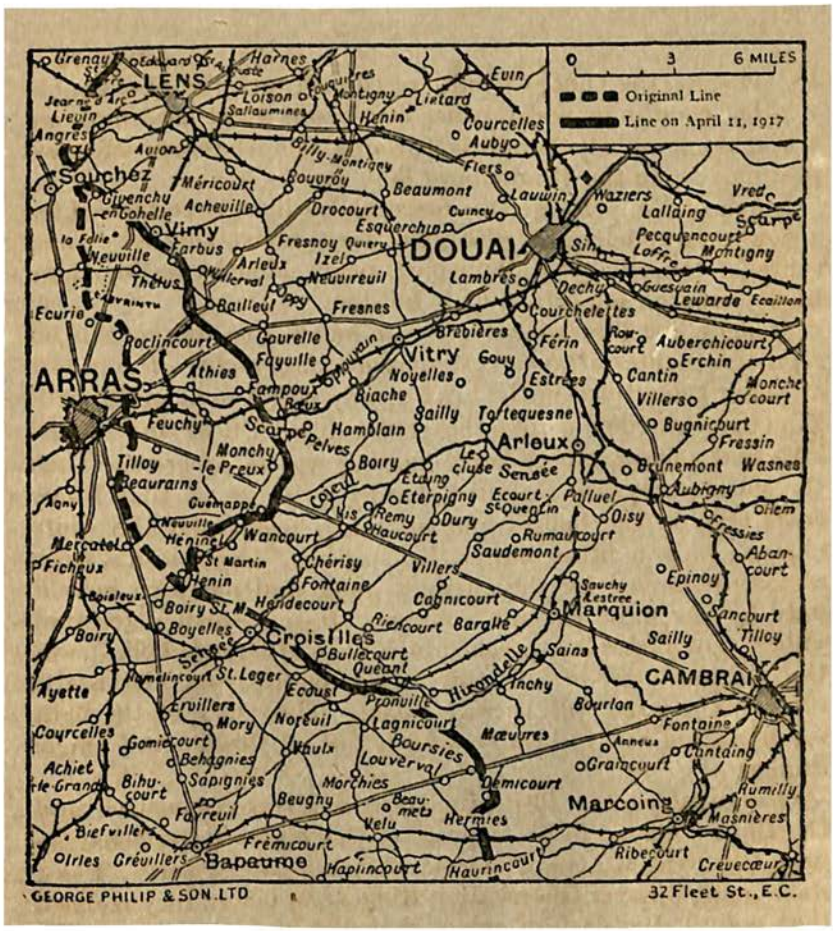
North of Vimy Ridge this morning his lines were pierced by a new attack, delivered with great force above Givenchy; and south of the village of Wancourt, below Monchy-le-Preux, we have seized an important little hill-top.

Monchy itself is securely in our hands this morning, after repeated counter-attacks yesterday and last night. In my last dispatch I described in the briefest way how I went up towards Monchy yesterday across the crowded battlefield and looked into that village, where fierce fighting was in progress. Then the village was still standing, hardly in ruins, so that I saw roofs still on the houses and unbroken walls, and the white château only a little scarred by shell-fire. Now it has been almost destroyed by the enemy's guns, and our men held it only by the most resolute courage. It is a small place that village, but yesterday, perched high beyond Orange Hill, it was the storm-centre of all this world-conflict, and the battle of Arras paused till it was taken. The story of the fight for it should live in history, and is full of strange and tragic drama.

Our cavalry—the 10th Hussars, the Essex Yeomanry, and the Blues—helped in the capture of this high village, behaving with the greatest acts of sacrifice to the ideals of duty. I saw them going up over Observation Ridge, and before they reached that point; the dash of splendid bodies of men riding at the gallop in a snow-storm which had covered them with white mantles and crowned their steel hats. Afterwards I saw some of these men being carried back wounded over the battlefield, and the dead body of their general, on a stretcher, taken by a small party of troopers through the ruins of another village to his resting-place. Many gallant horses lay dead, and those

which came back were caked with mud, and walked with drooping heads, exhausted in every limb. The bodies of dead boys lay all over these fields.

But the cavalry rode into Monchy and captured the north


3 6 MILES
Original Line
Line on April 11, 1917
LENS
Souchez
Vimy
ARRAS
DOUAI
Vitry
Arleux
Marquion
Croisilles
CAMBRAI
Marcoing
Bapaume
Monchy-le Preux
Wancourt
Hendecourt
Boursies
Louverval
Demicourt
Graincourt
Rumilly
Masnières
Ribecourt
Crevecœur
Hermies
Hauncourt
Hapincourt
Fremicourt
Beugny
Morchies
Sailly
Inchy
Bourlon
Fontaine
Cantaing
Epinoy
Sancourt
Tilloy
Abancourt
Villers
Saudemont
Rumaucourt
Oisy
Bullecourt
Queant
Pronville
Lagnicourt
Noreuil
Ecoust
Croisilles
Ervillers
Mory
Courcelles
Achiet-le-Grand
Bihucourt
Sapignies
Behagnies
Gomiecourt
Ayette
Hamelincourt
St. Leger
Boyelles
Boiry
Bienvillers
Grévillers
Irles
Biefvillers
Favreuil
Beaumetz
Velu
Haucourt
Remy
Dury
Etaing
Eterpigny
Ecourt-St-Quentin
Palluel
Aubigny
Dainville
Wasnes
Brunemont
Fressin
Bugnicourt
Villers-Cantin
Monchecourt
Auberchicourt
Erchin
Férin
Courchelettes
Dechy
Guesnain
Lewarde
Ecaillon
Lallaing
Vred
Waziers
Lauwin
Flers
Aubigny
Courcelles
Lintard
Henin
Montigny
Evin
Carvin
Harnes
Liévin
Angres
Avion
Méricourt
Acheville
Givenchy-en-Gohelle
Farbus
Neuville
Thélus
Ecurie
Roclincourt
Gouy
Estrées
Noyelles
Tortequesne
Hamblain
Pelves
Feuchy
Tilloy-les-Mofflaines
Beaurains
Cuméappe
Agny
Mercatel
Fichaux
Boisleux
Haute-Avesnes
Chérisy
Fontaine
Henin
St Martin
Sensée
Cagnicourt
Riencourt
Bargate
Saint
Sauchy-Lestrée
Lecluse
Oppy
Arleux
Fresnes
Izel
Quiery
Cuincy
Esquerchin
Beaumont
Drocourt
Gouvrey
Willerval
Baillieul
Gouzeaucourt
Fresnoy
Neuvireuil
Lambres
Sin
Pecquencourt
Montigny
Loffre
Scarpe
Vred
Courcelles
Aubyo
Corbehem
Sailly-Montigny
Sallaumines
Loison
Harnes
Estaires
Evin
Carvin
Liévin
Jeanne d'Arc
St Pierre
Souchez
Givenchy-en-Gohelle
La Folie
Neuville
Thélus
Ecurie
Roclincourt
Athies
Fampoux
Feuchy
Tilloy-les-Mofflaines
Beaurains
Agny
Cuméappe
Mercatel
Fichaux
Boisleux
Haute-Avesnes
Boiry St Martin
Boyelles
Boiry
Bienvillers
Grévillers
Irles
Biefvillers
Favreuil
Bihucourt
Achiet-le-Grand
Courcelles
Ayette
Hamelincourt
St. Leger
Ervillers
Mory
Gomiecourt
Behagnies
Sapignies
Beugny
Fremicourt
Bapaume
Hapincourt
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Ecourt-St-Quentin
Palluel
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Dainville
Wasnes
Brunemont
Fressin
Bugnicourt
Villers-Cantin
Monchecourt
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Carvin
Harnes
Liévin
Angres
Avion
Méricourt
Acheville
Givenchy-en-Gohelle
Farbus

up their withered old faces to be kissed by the troopers, who leaned over their saddles to give this greeting. Yet the battle was not over, and the shell-fire was most intense afterwards.

The women told strange stories of German officers billeted in their houses. After the battle of Arras began on Monday these officers were very nervous; but, although the sound of gun-fire swept nearer they did not believe that the English troops would get near Monchy for some days. Late on Wednesday night, after preparing for the defence of the village, they went to bed as usual, looking exhausted and nerve-racked, and told the women to wake them at six o'clock. They were awakened by another kind of knocking at the door. English and Scottish soldiers were firing outside the village, and the German officers escaped in such a hurry that they had no time to pull down the battalion flag outside their gate, and our men captured it as a trophy.

The attack on Monchy was made by English and Scottish troops—the Scots of the 15th Division—who fought very fiercely to clear the enemy out of Railway Triangle, where they were held up for three hours. Afterwards they fought on to Feuchy Redoubt, where they found that the whole of the German garrison had been buried by our bombardment, so that none escaped alive. At Feuchy Weir they captured a German electrical company, a captain and thirteen men, who were unarmed. The enemy shelled Feuchy village after our troops had passed through and gone far forward, where they dug in for the night under heavy shelling. Here they stayed all day on Tuesday close by a deep square pit, where four eight-inch howitzers had been abandoned to our cavalry.

Meanwhile English troops of the 37th Division—Warwicks and Bedfords, East and West Lancashire battalions, and the Yorks and Lancs—were advancing on the right and linking up for the attack on Monchy in conjunction with the Jocks. On the left bodies of cavalry assembled for a combined attack with Hotchkiss and machine guns; and at about five o'clock yesterday morning they swept upon the village. The cavalry went full split at a hard pace under heavy shrapnel-fire, and streamed into the village on the north side. They saw few Germans, for as they went in the enemy retreated to the southern side, hoping to escape by that way. Here they found themselves cut off by

our infantry, the English battalions mixed up with Scots before the fight was over. It was hard fighting. The enemy had many machine-guns, and defended himself from windows and roofs of houses, firing down upon our men as they swarmed into the village streets, and fought their way into farmyards and court-yards. It was a house-to-house hunt, and about two hundred prisoners were taken, though some of the garrison escaped to the trench in the valley below, where they had machine-gun redoubts. At about eight o'clock yesterday morning, twenty Scots and a small party of English went forward from Monchy with a Tank which had crawled up over heavy ground and shell-craters, and now trained its guns upon bodies of Germans moving over the ridge beyond. By this time English troops had a number of machine-guns in position for the defence of the village against any counter-attacks that might come. Some of our men had already explored the dug-outs and found them splendid for shelter under shell-fire. Under the château was a subterranean system furnished luxuriously and provided with electric light. Half an hour after the capture of the village some English and Scottish officers were drinking German beer out of German mugs.

The peace of Monchy did not last long. At nine o'clock the enemy shelled the place fiercely, and for a long time, with 5·9 guns, as I saw myself at midday from Observation Ridge, which was also under fire.

German airmen, flying above, watched our cavalry and infantry, and directed fire upon them. They were terrible hours to endure, but our men held out nobly; and when the enemy made his counter-attacks in the afternoon and evening, advancing in waves with a most determined spirit, they were hosed with machine-gun bullets and fell like grass before the scythe. Our 18-pounders also poured shell into them. This morning our men are in advance of the village, and the enemy has retreated from the trench below. The night was dreadful for men and beasts. Snow fell heavily, and was blown into deep drifts by wind as cold as ice. Wounded horses fell and died, and men lay in a white bed of snow in an agony of cold, while shells burst round them. As gallant as the fighting men were the supply columns, who sent up carriers through blizzard and shell-fire. At four o'clock in the morning a rum ration was served out, "And thank God for it," said one of our officers

lying out there in a shell-hole with a shattered arm. Strange and ironical as it seems, the post came up also at this hour, and men in the middle of the battlefield, suffering the worst agonies of war, had letters from home which in darkness they could not read.

That scene of war this morning might have been in Russia in midwinter, instead of in France in spring-time. Snow was thick over the fields, four foot deep where it had drifted against the banks. Tents and huts behind the lines were covered with snow roofs, and as I went through Arras this poor, stricken city was all white. Stones and fallen masonry which have poured down from great buildings of mediæval times were overlaid with snow—until, by midday, it was all turned to water. Then our Army moved through rivers of mud, and all our splendid horses were pitiful to see.

IV

THE OTHER SIDE OF VIMY

April 13

The enemy's Headquarters Staff is clearly troubled by the successes gained by our troops during these first days of the battle of Arras, and all attempts to repair the damage to his defensive positions upon which his future safety depends have been feeble and irresolute. It is certain that he desired to make a heavy counter-attack upon the northern edge of the Vimy Ridge. Prisoners taken yesterday all believed that this would be done without delay. The 5th Grenadiers of the Prussian Guards Reserve were hurriedly brought up to relieve or support the Bavarian troops, who had suffered frightfully, and massed in a wood, called the Bois d'Hirondelle, or Swallows' Wood, in order to steal through another little wood called Bois-en-Hache to a hill known by us as the Pimple, and so on to recapture Hill 145, taken by the Canadians on Monday night after heavy and costly fighting. This scheme broke down utterly. Swallows' Wood was heavily bombed by our aeroplanes, so that the massed Prussians had an ugly time there, and yesterday morning Canadian troops made a sudden assault upon the Pimple, which is a knoll slightly lower than Hill 145, to its right, and gained it in spite of fierce machine-gun fire

from the garrison, who defended themselves stubbornly until they were killed or captured. At the same time Bois-en-Hache, which stands on rising ground across the little valley of the River Souchez, was attacked with great courage by the 24th Division, and the enemy driven out.

It was difficult work for our infantry and gunners. The ground was a bog of shell-craters and mud, and there was a blizzard of snowflakes. The attack was made with a kind of instinct, backed with luck. Our men stumbled forward in a wake of snow-squalls and shells, fell into shell-holes, climbed out again, and by some skill of their own kept their bombs and rifles dry. Machine-gun bullets whipped the ground about them. Some fell and were buried in snow-drifts; others went on and reached their goal, and in a white blizzard routed out the enemy and his machine-guns. It was an hour or two later that German officers, directing operations at a distance and preparing a counter-attack on the Vimy Ridge, heard that the Pimple and Bois-en-Hache had both gone — the only places which gave observation on the south side of Vimy and made effective any attack. Their curses must have been deep and full when that message came over the telephone wires. They ordered their batteries to fire continuously on those two places, but they remain ours, and our troops have endured intense barrage-fire without losing ground. Now we have full and absolute observation over Vimy Ridge to the enemy's side of the country reversing all the past history of this position, and we are making full and deadly use of it. The enemy still clings to Vimy village on the other side of the slopes, and to the line of railway on the eastern side of Farbus, but it is an insecure tenure, and our guns are making life hideous for the German soldiers in those places, and in the villages farther back in the direction of Douai, and along the road which he is using for his transport. In the village of Bailleul down there are a number of batteries which the enemy has vainly endeavoured to withdraw. We are smothering them with shell-fire, and he will find it difficult to get them away, though he can ill afford the loss of more guns. The enemy has been in great trouble to move his guns away rapidly enough owing to the dearth of transport horses. Even before the battle of Arras began the German batteries had to borrow horses from each other because there were not enough

for all, and some of his guns have been abandoned because of that lack. He cannot claim that he has left us only broken and useless guns.

When the Scottish and South African troops of the 9th Division made the great attack on Monday last the South-Africans were led forward by their colonels, and took the first German line without a single casualty. Afterwards they fought against wicked machine-gun fire, but, sweeping all before them, and gathering in hundreds of prisoners, they seized a number of guns, including several 5·9 howitzers. A vast amount of ammunition lay about in dumps, and our men turned the guns about, and are using them against the enemy. To South-Africans who fought in Delville Wood—I have told the story of this tragic epic in the battle of the Somme—this is a triumph that pays back a little for old memories under German gun-fire. Their revenge is sweet and frightful, and they call the captured guns, those monstrous five-point-nines, their trench-mortar battery.

During this fighting our airmen have flown with extraordinary valour, and have done great work. They flew in snow-storms, as I saw them and marvelled, on the east side of Arras, and circled round for hours taking photographs of the enemy's positions and spotting his batteries so accurately, in spite of weather which half blinded them, that the German gunners who are now our prisoners say that they were terrorized by being made targets for our fire.

Farther south yesterday and to-day we have made new breaches in the Hindenburg line by the capture of Wancourt and Héninel, villages south of Monchy. The fighting here has been most severe, and our men of the 14th and 56th Divisions—London Rangers, Kensingtons, Middlesex, London Scottish, and King's Royal Rifles—lying out on open slopes in deep snow and under icy gales at night, swept by machine-gun barrages from Guémappe and with the sky above them flashing with shrapnel bursts and high explosives, have had to endure a terrible ordeal. They have done so with a noble spirit, and young wounded men to whom I spoke yesterday, in the great crypt to which they had crawled down from the battlefield, all spoke of their experience as though they would go through as much again in order to ensure success, without bragging, with a full sense of the frightful hours, but with unbroken spirit.

"I am not out here to make a career," said a Canadian; "I am out to finish an ugly job."

It is to end this filthy war quickly that our men are fighting so grimly and with such deadly resolution. So the Londoners have fought their way into Wancourt and Héninel, and there were great uncut belts of wire before them—the new wire of the Hindenburg line—and trenches and strong points from which machine-guns gushed out waves of bullets. One of the strong points hereabouts is called the Egg, because of its oval hummock, which was hard to hatch and crack, but as one of our officers said to-day, the Egg gave forth two hundred prisoners.

In the fighting for the two villages the Londoners were held up by those great stretches of wire before them and were menaced most evilly by the enfilade fire of machine-guns from Guémappe and a high point south. Two Tanks came to the rescue, and did most daring things.

"Romped up," said an officer, though I have not seen Tanks romping.

Anyhow, they came up in their elephantine way, getting the most out of their engines and most skilfully guided by their young officers and crews, who were out on a great and perilous adventure. Climbing over rough ground, cleaving through snow-drifts and mud-banks with their steel flanks, thrusting their blunt noses above old trenches and sand-bag barricades, they made straight for the great hedges of barbed wire, and drove straight through, leaving broad lanes of broken strands. One cruised into Wancourt, followed from a distance by the shouts and cheers of the infantry. It wandered up and down the village like a bear on the prowl for something good to eat. It found human food and trampled upon machine-gun redoubts, firing into German hiding-places. The second Tank struck a zigzag course for Héninel, and in that village swept down numbers of German soldiers, so that they fled from this black monster against which bombs and rifles were of no avail. For forty hours those two Tanks—let me be fair to the men inside and say those officers and crews—did not rest, but went about on their hunting trail, breaking down wire and searching out German strong points, so that the way would be easier for our infantry.

Even then our men had no easy fighting. The enemy

defended themselves stubbornly in places. Their snipers and bombers and machine-gunners did not yield at the first sight of the bayonets. While some of our troops bombed their way down trenches towards Wancourt, others worked up from the south, and at last both parties met exultantly behind this section of the Hindenburg line, greeting each other with cheers. Nearly two hundred prisoners were taken hereabout, all Silesian mechanics, like those I met at Loos in September 1915—rather miserable men, with no heart in the war, because, as Poles, it is none of their making.

It is true to say—utterly true—that all the prisoners we have taken this week, Prussians, Bavarians, Hamburgers, have lost all spirit for this fighting, hate it, loathe it as a devilish fate from which they have luckily escaped at last with life. Not one prisoner has said now that Germany will win on land. Their best hope is that the submarine campaign will force an early settlement. Their pockets are stuffed with letters from wives, sisters, and parents telling of starvation at home. It is not good literature for the spirit of an army. The prisoners themselves come to us starving. It is not because their rations in the trenches are insufficient. They are on short commons, but have enough for bodily strength. It is because our bombardment prevented all supplies from reaching them for three or four days. In one prisoners' enclosure, when our escort brought food, the men fought with each other like wild beasts, ravenous, and had to be separated by force and threats. The officers in charge of these prisoners' camps are overwhelmed by the masses of men. In one of them, where 4000 were gathered, they broke the barriers. A captain and subaltern of ours were alone to deal with this situation; but their own non-commissioned officers helped to restore order.

The position of the enemy now is full of uncertainty for him. It is possible that he will try to avoid any disaster by falling back farther to the Drocourt—Quéant line, and by slipping away farther north. The Hindenburg line is pierced, but he has established a series of switch-lines which will enable him to stand until our guns are ready again to make those positions untenable. The weather so far is in his favour, except that his troops are suffering as much as ours from cold and wet.

V

THE WAY TO LENS

APRIL 14

THE capture of the Vimy Ridge by heroic assault of the Canadians and Scots, and their endurance in holding it under the enemy's heavy fire, have been followed swiftly by good results. Our troops have pushed forward to-day through Liévin, the long and straggling suburb of Lens, clearing street after street of German machine-gunners and rear-guard posts, and our patrols are on the outskirts of Lens itself, the great mining town, which is famous in France as the capital and centre of her northern mine-fields.

The retaking of this city of mine-shafts and pit-heads, electrical power stations, and great hive of mining activity, where a population of something like 40,000 people lived in rows of red-brick cottages, under a forest of high chimneys and mountainous slag-heaps, would cause a thrill through all France, and be one of the greatest achievements of the war—a tremendous feat of arms for the British troops. I looked into the city to-day, down its silent and deserted streets, and I saw a body of our men working forward to get closer to it. They attacked the little wooded hill called the Bois de Riaumont, just to the south of the city, and with great cunning and courage encircled its lower slopes, and made their way into the street of houses behind the line of trees which is the southern way towards Lens. From the western side, up through Liévin, the other troops were advancing cautiously. The enemy was still there in machine-gun redoubts, which will be very troublesome to our men. But they are only rear-guards, for the main body of the enemy has already retreated. When the Canadians swept over the Vimy Ridge, capturing thousands of prisoners, and when yesterday our 24th Division and Canadian troops seized the Bois-en-Hache and the Pimple, two small ridges or knolls below Hill 145, at the northern end of the Vimy Ridge, the enemy saw that his last chance of successful counter-attack was foiled, and at once he was seized with fear and prepared for instant retreat in wild confusion. Lens and Liévin had been stacked with his guns. Both towns had been fortified in

a most formidable way, and were strongholds of massed artillery. It is certain that the enemy had at least 150 guns in that great network of mines and pit-heads. But they were all threatened by an advance down the northern slopes of Vimy, and the Canadians were not likely to stay inactive after their great triumph. They were also threatened by the British advance from the Loos battlefields by way of that great pair of black slag-hills called the Double Crassier, famous in this war for close, long, and bloody fighting, where since September of 1915 our men have been only a few yards away from their enemy, and where I saw them last a month or two ago through a chink of wall in a ruined house. German staff officers knew their peril yesterday, and before. From prisoners we know that wild scenes took place in Lens, frantic efforts being made to get away the guns and the stores, to defend the line of retreat by the blowing up of roads, to carry out the orders for complete destruction by firing charges down the mine-shafts, flooding the great mine-galleries so that French property of enormous value should not be left to France, and withdrawing large bodies of troops down the roads under the fire of our long-range guns. Up to dawn yesterday the enemy in Lens hoped that the British pursuit would be held back by the German rear-guards in Vimy and Petit-Vimy villages. But that hope was flung from them when the Canadians swept down the ridge and chased the enemy out of those places on the lower slopes towards Douai.

To-day, as I went towards Lens over Notre-Dame-de-Lorette and the valley beyond, I met a number of those men coming back after their victorious fighting. Amongst them were Nova-Scotians and young lumbermen and fishermen from the Far West. They came in single file, in a long procession through a wood—the Bois de Bouvigny—where once, two years ago, young Frenchmen fought with heroic fury and died in thousands to gain this ground, so that even now all this hill is strewn with their relics.

The boys of Nova Scotia came slowly, dragging one foot after another in sheer exhaustion, stumbling over loose stones and bits of sand-bags and strands of old wire. They were caked with clay from head to foot. Even their faces had masks of clay, and they were spent and done. But through that whitish mud their eyes were steel-blue and struck fire like steel when

they told me of the good victory they had shared in, and of the enemy's flight before them—all this without a touch of brag, with a fine and sweet simplicity, with a manly frankness. They have suffered tragic hardships in those five days since the battle of Arras began, but there was no wail in them. When they first emerged from the tunnels on the morning of the great attack they had been swept by machine-gun fire, but by good luck escaped heavy casualties, though many fell.

"Our losses were not nearly so high as we expected," said one lad, "but it was pretty bad all the same. Old Heine had an ugly habit of keeping one hand on his machine-gun till we were fifty paces from him, and then holding up the other hand and shouting 'Mercy! Mercy!' I don't call that a good way of surrendering."

The enemy surrendered in hundreds on that day, as I have already described, and the worst came afterwards for the Canadians. The enemy's barrage was heavy, but even that was not the worst. It was difficult to get food up, more difficult to get water. I met lads who had been without a drop for three days. One of them, a fine, hefty fellow, strong as a sapling, could hardly speak to me above a whisper. All of them had swollen tongues and licked their dry lips in a parched way. Some of them had been lucky enough to find French wine in the German dug-outs. Then a wild snow-storm came. "I thought I should die," said one man, "when for hours I had to carry wounded through the snow over ground knee-deep in mud and all slippery. All my wounded were terribly heavy."

But, in spite of all this, those brave, weary men went down the Vimy slopes at dawn yesterday with the same high, grim spirit to clear "Old Heine," as they call him, out of Vimy and Little Vimy villages.

"They didn't wait for us," said a young Canadian officer. "One would think that the war would be over in a month by the way they ran yesterday."

"Old Heine was scared out of his wits," said another lad. "He ran screaming from us. In a dug-out I found two Germans too scared even to run. They just sat and trembled like poor, cowed beasts. But there was one fellow we took who got over his fright quick, and spoke in a big way. He had been a waiter and spoke good English.

"'When will the war end?' we asked.

"'Germany will fight five years,' he said, 'and then we will win.'

"'Don't you believe it, old sport,' said we, 'you're done in now, and it's only the mopping up we have to do.'"

Down in the Bois-en-Hache one of our English soldiers of the 24th Division on the Canadians' left had a grim adventure, which he describes as "a bit of orl rite." His way was barred by a burly German, but not for long. After a tussle our lad took him inside, and there found the dead body of a German officer lying by the side of the table, which was all spread for breakfast. It was our English lad who ate the breakfast, keeping one eye vigilant on his living prisoner and not worrying about the dead one.

There was another soldier of ours, one of the Leinsters, also of the 24th Division, who ate his breakfast in Angres, but he was in jovial company. He came across a German at the entrance and fought with him, but in a friendly kind of way. After knocking each other about they came to an understanding, and sat down together in a dug-out to a meal of German sausage, cheese, black bread, and French wine. They found a great deal of human nature in common, and were seen coming out later arm in arm, and in this way the Irishman brought back his prisoner.

The colonel of the Leinsters told another queer tale of an Irishman in the outskirts of Lens. The colonel saw him after the battle of Bois-en-Hache, which was a terrible affair and a fine feat of arms in the mud and snow, bringing back a German horse under machine-gun fire and shrapnel. He was guiding this poor lean beast over frightful ground, round the edge of monstrous shell-craters, through broken strands of barbed wire, and across trenches and parapets. "What are you doing with that poor brute?" asked the commanding officer. "Sure, sir," said the Irishman, "I'm bringing the horse back for Father Malone to ride." The horse was in the last stages of starvation, and the padre weighs nineteen stone, according to the popular estimate of the men, who adore him, and that is part of the story's humour, though the Irish soldier was very serious. It is a tribute, anyhow, to the affection of the men for this Irish padre—a laughing giant of a man—who is always out in No Man's Land when there are any of his lads out there,

going as far as the German barbed wire to give the last rites to dying men. To-day, when I called on the Leinster battalion, he was away burying the poor boys who lie in the mud of the battlefield. There is no humour in that side of war, though Irish soldiers, and English soldiers too, refuse to be beaten by the foulest conditions until the last strength is out of them. In addition to the ordeal of battle they are enduring now a weather so abominable, when it is in the fields of battle, that men fight for days wet to the skin, lie out at night frozen stiff, and struggle after the enemy up to the knees in mud. So it was in this little battle of Bois-en-Hache, an historic episode in the battle of Arras, because it broke the enemy's last hope of a counter-attack against Vimy Ridge. Through the blinding blizzard of snow, the English and Irish troops attacked this hill above the River Souchez, and had to cross through a quagmire, so that numbers of them stuck up to the waist and could go neither forward nor backward, while they were swept by machine-gun and rifle fire. From that other hill, called the Pimple, to their right, which was not yet taken by the Canadians, one man came back wounded over that abominable ground under rifle-fire which spat bullets about him. He stumbled into shell-holes and crawled out again, and just as he reached the trench, fell dead across the parapet. Nearly all our men were hit in the head and body, none in the legs. That was because they were knee-deep in mud. Our men came back from this fighting like figures of clay, and so stiff at the joints that they can hardly walk, and with voices gone so that they speak in whispers.

All over this lower slope of the Vimy Ridge is a litter of enormous destruction caused by our gun-fire. German guns and limbers, machine-guns and trench-mortars lie in fragments and in heaps in infernal chaos of earth, which is the graveyard of many German dead. The first hint that the Germans were in retreat from Liévin, near Lens, was given by the strange adventure of two of our airmen. They had to make a forced landing near Lens, and one of them was wounded in the leg. Our observing officers watching through glasses expected them to be made prisoners, but they were seen afterwards smoking cigarettes and slapping themselves to keep warm. It now turns out that the German soldiers did not wait to take them, and finding one man wounded left the other to look after him. The next sign

that the enemy was about to go was when the fires and explosions went up in Liévin and Lens, and when he began to shell his own front lines outside those places. All through the night the sky was aflame with these fires, and this morning I saw that the enemy was making a merry little hell in Lens and all its suburbs and dependent villages. I had no need to guess the reason of all this. On the way I had met two young Alsatian prisoners just captured. They had been left with orders and charges to blow up mine-shafts, but had been caught before they had done so. They had no heart in the job anyhow, being of Alsace, and with their comrades had already petitioned to fight on the Eastern instead of the Western Front. They described the panic that reigned in Lens, and the fearful haste to destroy and get away. For hours to-day I watched that destruction while our troops were working forward through Liévin to get the better of the nests of machine-gun redoubts at the entrance to Lens, from which intense fire still came.

I had an astounding view of all this work in Lens, and it was as beautiful as a dream-picture and weird as a nightmare. The snows had melted, and the wind had turned south, and the sun was pouring down under a blue sky across which white fleece sailed. Below, outspread, was a wide panorama of battle, from Loos to Vimy, the great panorama of French mining country, with all its slag-hills casting black shadows across the sun-swept plain, and thousands of miners' cottages, "corons" as they are called, all bright and red as the light poured upon them, all arranged in straight rows and oblong blocks of streets in separate townships. Not one of these houses was without shell-holes and broken walls, for the war has swept round them and over them for two years and more, but they looked strangely new and complete. Between them and beyond them and all about them tall chimneys stood and enormous steel girders and gantries of pit-head and power stations. To the left of Lens the tower of the main waterworks was crowned with a white dome like a Grecian temple, and to the right was Lens Church, behind a hill where I saw our men fighting. It was like looking at war in Bolton or Wigan, but more beautiful than those towns of ours, because the walls were not black and there was a bright, fine light over all this mining country. The Double Crassier on the edge of the Loos

battlefields was to the left of where I stood, curiously white and chalky as the sun flung its rays upon those two close hillocks. Moving forward towards Lens I looked straight down the streets of that city. If a cat had moved across one of those roads I should have seen it. If Germans had come out of any of those houses I should have seen them. But nothing moved up the streets or down them. All those straight streets were empty. It looked as if those thousands of red houses were uninhabited. But all the time I watched enormous explosions rose in Lens and Liévin, sending up volumes of curly smoke. The enemy was destroying the city and its priceless mining works. As the mines exploded it looked as if the earth had opened among all this maze of works and cottages, letting forth turbulent clouds of fire and smoke. It was mostly smoke with a stab of flame in the heart of it. Some of these thick, rising clouds were richly coloured with the red dust of cottages, but others were of absolute black, spreading out in mushroom shape monstrously.

The explosions continued all the morning and afternoon, and after seeing those Alsatian prisoners I could imagine the German pioneers under the same orders going about with charges in the cellars of the houses and deep down in the mine-shafts and galleries setting their fuses and touching them off from a safe distance. It was dirty work. Meanwhile, our men advancing from Liévin, and through it, were having a hard and costly task to rout out the machine-gun emplacements, especially in two terribly strong redoubts known to us as Crook and Crazy Redoubts, defending the western side of Lens. But though these were strong, fortified positions, there were machine-guns in many other places among all those groups of miners' cottages.

I ought to explain that each group or collection of streets in the square blocks is called a "cité." In the northern part of Lens there are the Cité St.-Pierre, the Cité St.-Edouard, the Cité St.-Laurent, the Cité Ste.-Auguste, and the Cité Ste.-Elisabeth. Westward there are the Cité Jeanne-d'Arc and the Cité St.-Théodore. South there are the Cité du Moulin and the Cité de Riaumont. Each one of these places had its own separate defences of barbed wire and sand-bag barricades, and each a nest of machine-guns. It is clear that when these guns were served by rear-guard posts, ordered to hold on to the last, a

quick advance through Lens would have been at great and needless sacrifice of life. When our men were checked a while by the terrible sweep of bullets in the northern and western cités our artillery opened heavy fire and poured in shells, which I watched from ground below Notre-Dame-de-Lorette. I had walked on from that ridge and was looking into Lens when I saw a movement of men below an embankment to the right of the small hill in the south of the city called Bois de Riaumont. Between the embankment and the hill was a sunken road leading just below the hill to a long straight street of ruined houses lined with an avenue of dead trees. There were belts of wire fixed down the hill-side from the wood on the crest. This ground, swept by sunlight, was the scene of a grim little drama which I watched with intense interest. At first I thought our men were about to make a direct assault upon the hill-side. They came swarming across the open ground in small groups widely scattered, but in two distinct waves. For a while they took cover under the embankment, while other groups crept up to them; then, after half an hour or so, they advanced again, half-left, at the double, led by an officer well in advance of all his men. They crossed the sunken road and went up the slope on the south side of the hill; but, instead of pressing up to the crest, suddenly disappeared into the long, straight street fringed with trees. No sooner had they gone down that sinister street then the enemy flung a barrage right along the embankment where they had first assembled. If they had still been there it would have been a tragic business, and I felt joyful that they had not waited longer. Other men crept up from the ground below where I stood, steered an erratic course, took cover in old German trenches, and then made short, sharp rushes till they dropped also into the sinister street. Later in the afternoon the enemy barraged his old line of trenches with heavy crumps—which is a way he has when he leaves a place—and presently shells began to fall unpleasantly near to where I stood, getting closer as time passed. I found it wise to shift three times, but on scaling the high ridge of Notre-Dame-de-Lorette again I lingered to look at the great picture of war outspread below—that long seven-mile stretch of miners' villages crowding densely up to Lens—the great outbursts of red and black smoke between the slag-heaps and chimneys away to the battlefield of Loos, across which sunlight

and shadows chased in long bars—and our shell-fire heavy around Lens church and far beyond where enemy's troops and transport were hurrying in retreat. Overhead there was the loud droning of many aeroplanes and flights of invisible shells, shrill-voiced as they travelled with frightful speed.

LATER

THE weather has changed again since yesterday, and there is no blue in the sky to-day and no sunshine, but cold rain-storms, cloaking all the line of battle in shrouds of mist. Fires are still burning in Lens, the grey smoke is drifting across the mine-fields, and every hour there are big explosions, showing that the German pioneers are still busy destroying all the wealth of machinery in the city and blowing up the roads before leaving. New prisoners describe all this frankly enough. Down one mine-shaft they flung 20,000 hand-grenades. They have enormous stores of explosives of every kind for this purpose, because this mining district was crammed with German stores. They had to leave Liévin in such haste that they could neither carry away this ammunition nor destroy all of it, and vast quantities of bombs, trench-mortars and shells have fallen into our hands.

Yesterday the English and Irish troops who had taken Bois-en-Hache with such fine courage, in spite of the most severe conditions of weather and ground, worked farther forward through Liévin. Explosions from concealed charges burst around them, and machine-gun fire from many redoubts swept down the long, straight streets of miners' cottages; but they worked their way up under cover, rushed several of the concrete emplacements, and took heroic risks with a most grim spirit. During the evening the enemy recovered from his first panic and sent supporting troops back into Lens to hold the line of trenches and machine-gun forts on the western side in order to delay our advance on to Lens until he has had more time to make ready his positions in the Drocourt—Quéant line, the Wotan end of the Hindenburg line, upon which we are forcing him to withdraw. It makes a difference to a number of poor souls expecting deliverance. According to prisoners there are about 2000 people, mostly women, old men, and children; living in the district of Lens, and waiting to break their way through to our side of the lines.

I set out to find them this morning, as there were reported rumours that they had escaped through Liévin. But this is untrue. Owing to the German rally they are still hemmed in by the enemy's machine-gun redoubts, and I am told that they are down in the cellars of a neighbouring village, taking cover from the shell-fire which we are pouring on the hostile strong points located in their cités.

Meanwhile our guns are finding human targets for slaughter. The sufferings of our men are great, their courage is tested by fire; but the fate of the enemy's soldiers is atrocious beyond all imaginings. I have seen with my own eyes the effect of our gun-fire during the last fortnight, and it is annihilating. Owing to our destruction and capture of many batteries and the necessity of the German retreat to save further disaster, the enemy's infantry have been in desperate plight and have suffered torture. We have smashed their trenches, broken their telephone wires, imprisoned them in barrages through which no food can come. In captured letters and memoranda we find cries for rescue, pitiful in their despair. Here is a message from the 3rd Battalion, 51st Infantry Regiment:

"Since the telephone connexion is so inadequate it becomes doubly necessary to call on the artillery by light signals. These are only of use if attended to. Failing to get artillery reply to the enemy's fire I sent up red star-shells. The artillery took no notice. The artillery should be bound to reply to such signals.

"For our infantry, which since the Somme battles has been on the defensive, it is, from the point of view of moral, of importance to count on artillery support with certainty. The infantry that comes to regard itself morally as a target for the hostile artillery must in the long run give way."

Here is an extract from a memorandum sent by a German machine-gunner:

"The relief of this detachment is earnestly requested. We have already spent seven days in the greatest tumult. One section of trench after another gets blown in. The detachment, which now consists of three men, has eaten nothing since yesterday morning. To-morrow what remains of the front trenches will probably be shattered. If the position were not so frightfully serious, I would not have written this report."

Yesterday I spent half an hour with one of our own batteries of 60-pounders, those long-nosed beasts which have a range of five miles and have helped in this great slaughter of the enemy. The commanding officer, once a judge-advocate of Johannesburg, was a man whose joviality covered a grim, resolute spirit.

"My beauties," he said, "fired 1000 high-velocity shells at Old Fritz before breakfast on Monday morning. We did some very pretty work on the German lines."

I saw his store of shells—monstrous brutes—in spite of all this expenditure; and listened to details of destruction in a wooden hut, provided with a piano—made by a Paris firm and captured recently in a German dug-out.

"Don't your gunners get worn out?" I asked.

He laughed and said, "They stick it till all's blue, night and day. What they hate are fatigues and carrying up the shells for other batteries. They'll work till they drop, serving their own guns."

He looked over to Lens and said, "We'll soon have old Fritz out of that." I think they were some of his shells that I saw bursting behind the Bois de Riaumont.

All through this battle our airmen have been untiring, too. Two of our men, a pilot and an observer, were attacked by a squadron of twenty-eight hostile machines, and the pilot was grievously wounded. He was badly hit in the leg, and one of his eyes hung only by a thread. But, with a supreme act of courage, he kept control of his machine and landed safely. He was dying when he was helped on to a stretcher and brought home to camp; but he made his report very clearly and calmly until he was overcome by the last faintness of death.

Our men have still most bloody fighting before them. The enemy is still in great strength. We shall have to mourn most tragic and fearful losses. But the tide of battle seems to be setting in our favour, and beating back against the walls of the German armies, who must hear the approach of it with forebodings, because the barriers they built have broken and there are no impregnable ramparts behind.

VI

THE SLAUGHTER AT LAGNICOURT

APRIL 16

WHAT happened at Lagnicourt yesterday is one of the bloodiest episodes in all this long tale of slaughter. At 4.30, before daybreak, the enemy made a very heavy attack upon our lines, where we are far beyond the old system of trenches and for a time in real open warfare of the old style, which I, for one, never believed would come again. The enemy's lines were protected with a new belt of barbed wire, without which he can never stay on any kind of ground; but it was this which proved his undoing. His massed attack against Australian troops had a brief success. Battalions of Prussian Guards, charging in waves, broke through our forward posts, and drove a deep wedge into our positions. Here they stayed for a time, doing what damage they could, searching round for prisoners, and waiting, perhaps, for reserves to renew and strengthen the impetus of their attack. But the Australian staff officers were swift in preparing and delivering the counter-blow, which fell upon the enemy at 7.30. Companies of Australians swept forward, and with irresistible spirit flung themselves upon the Prussians, forcing them to retreat. They fell back in an oblique line from their way of advance, forced deliberately that way by the pressure and direction of the Australian attack. At the same time our batteries opened fire upon them with shrapnel as they ran, more and more panic-stricken, towards their old lines. The greatest disaster befell them, for they found themselves cut off by their own wire, those great broad belts of sharp spiked strands which they had planted to bar us off.

What happened then was just appalling slaughter. The Australian infantry used their rifles as never rifles have been used since the first weeks of the war, when our old regulars of the first expeditionary force lay down at Le Cateau on the way of their retreat and fired into the advancing tide of Germans, so that they fell in lines.

Yesterday, in that early hour of the morning, the Australian riflemen fired into the same kind of target of massed men, not far away, so that each shot found the mark. The Prussians

struggled frantically to tear a way through the wire, to climb over it, crawl under it. They cursed and screamed, ran up and down like rats in a trap, until they fell dead. They fell so that dead bodies were piled upon dead bodies in long lines of mortality before and in the midst of that spiked wire. They fell and hung across its strands. The cries of the wounded, long tragic wails, rose high above the roar of rifle-fire and the bursting of shrapnel. And the Australian soldiers, quiet and grim, shot on and on till each man had fired a hundred rounds, till more than fifteen hundred German corpses lay on the field at Lagnicourt. Large numbers of prisoners were taken, wounded and unwounded, and five Prussian regiments have been identified. The Prussian Guard has always suffered from British troops as by some dire fatality. At Ypres, at Contalmaison, in several of the Somme battles, they were cut to pieces. But this massacre at Lagnicourt is the worst episode in their history, and it will be remembered by the German people as a black and fearful thing.

VII

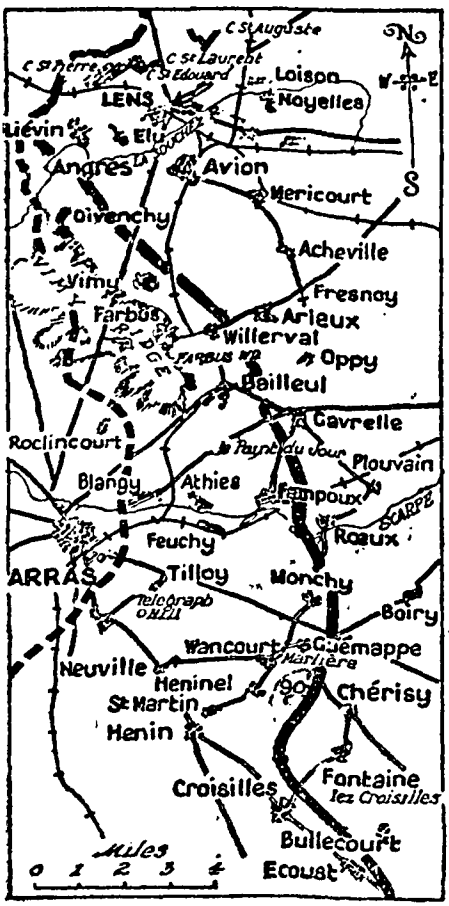
THE TERRORS OF THE SCARPE

APRIL 23

THE battle of Arras has entered into its second phase—that is to say, into a struggle harder than the first days of the battle on April 9, when by a surprise, following great preparations, we gained great successes all along the line.

This morning, shortly before five o'clock, English, Welsh, and Scottish troops made new and strong assaults east of Arras upon the German line between Gavrelle, Guémappe, and Fontaine-lez-Croisilles, which is the last switch-line on this part of the Front between us and the main Hindenburg line. It has been hard fighting everywhere, for the enemy was no longer uncertain of the place where we should attack him. As soon as the battle of Arras started it was clear to him that we should deliver our next blow when we had moved forward our guns upon this "Oppy" line, as we call it, which protects the Hindenburg positions north and south of Vitry-en-Artois. His troops were told to expect our attack at any moment, and to hold on at all costs of life. To meet our strength the enemy brought up many new batteries, which he placed in front of

the Hindenburg line, and close behind the Oppy line, and massed large numbers of machine-guns in the villages, trenches, and emplacements, from which he could sweep our line of advance by direct and enfilade fire. These machine-guns were thick in the ruins of Rœux, just north of the River Scarpe; in Pelves, just south of it, in two small woods called Bois du Sart and Bois du Vert, immediately facing Monchy, on the slope of the hill; and in and about the village of Guémappe, which we had assaulted and entered twice before. Many German snipers, men of good marksmanship and tried courage, were placed all about in shell-holes with orders to pick off our officers and men, and the enemy's gunners had registered all our positions so that they were ready to drop down a heavy barrage directly our men made a sign of attacking. For some days after the second day of the battle of Arras they had fired a great many shells along and behind our front lines in order to shake the nerve of our troops, and had poured fire into Monchy-on-the-Hill after its capture by our cavalry and infantry during those deadly hours of fighting already described. It was only to be expected that this second phase of the battle of Arras should be extremely hard. For our men it is a battle to the death. Fighting is in progress at all the points attained by our troops, and there is an ebb and flow of men—beaten back for a while



Line on April 23, 1917

by intensity of fire, but attacking again and getting forward. It is certain that Gavrelle is ours (thus breaking the Oppy line north of the River Scarpe); that our men are beyond Guémappe, on the south of the Scarpe, though the enemy is still fighting at this hour of the afternoon in or about that village; and that on the extreme right of the attack the enemy has suffered disaster north of Croisilles, and has lost large numbers of men in killed and prisoners.

At the outset of the attack the enemy showed himself ready to meet it with a fierce resistance. Last night was terribly cold, and our troops lying out in shell-holes or in shallow trenches dug a day or two ago, suffered from this exposure. The Scottish troops of the 15th Division on the south of the Scarpe had fought in the first days' battles of Arras, and, with English troops of the 87th, had gone forward to Monchy and into the storm-centre of the German fire. Some of the men I met to-day had been buried by German crumps, and had been dug out again, and as they lay waiting for the hour of attack shells fell about them and the sky was aflame with flashes of our bombs. The men craved for something hot to drink. "I would have given all the money I have for a cup of tea," said one of them. But they nibbled dry biscuits and waited for the dawn, and hoped they would not be too numb when the light came to get up and walk. The light came very pale over the earth, and with it the signal to attack. Our bombardment had been steady all through the night, and then broke into hurricane fire. As soon as our men left the trenches our gunners laid down a barrage in front of them, and made a moving wall of shells ahead of them—a frightful thing to follow, but the safest if the men did not go too quick or fail to distinguish between the line of German shells and our own. It was not easy to distinguish, for our men had hardly risen from the shell-holes and ditches before the enemy's barrage started, and all the ground about them was vomiting up fountains of mud and shell-splinters. At the same time there came above all the noise of shell-fire a furnace-blast of machine-guns. Machine-gunners in Rœux and Pelves, in the two small woods in front of Monchy, and in the ground about Guémappe were slashing all the slopes and roads below Monchy-on-the-Hill.

"It was the most awful machine-gun fire I have heard," said

a young Gordon this morning, as he came back with a bullet in his hip. "The beggars were ready for us, and made it very hot. But we folk went on, those of us who weren't hit quickly, and made an attack on the village of Guémappe."

"The enemy dropped his barrage on to us mighty quick," said a Worcestershire lad, "but we managed, most of us, to get past his crumps. It took a lot of dodging in shell-holes, and the worst was his machine-gun fire, which was terrific."

Below Monchy the enemy was in trenches defended by enfilade fire from redoubts along the Cambrai road, and when our English troops swept down on them the Germans ran at once up their own slope to the cover of a wood called Bois du Sart. Only one officer and two men remained, and they were taken prisoner, and I saw them being marched back under escort. The officer was a young Bavarian without a hat; he bore himself very jauntily, though his face was white and he was covered with dirt.

The Worcesters and Hampshires of the 29th Division, farther north and just south of the Scarpe, were held up for some time by the intensity of the machine-gun fire, and before getting on had to wait the arrival of a Tank which was crawling up by way of the lone copse. They were then fighting heavily about Shrapnel-and-Bayonet Trench, and afterwards made their way forward again under heavy fire, and passed a number of German snipers lying in shell-holes to right and left of them. They were swept by machine-gun fire and heavily counter-attacked.

To the north of the River Scarpe our progress was quicker, and Scottish battalions of the 15th Division made their advance towards Rœux by way of a fortified farm and chemical works, in which machine-guns were hidden. Round about here the enemy lost very heavily. In trying to escape from the ruins of the farm many of them were killed and lay in a row to the left of the place. In the chemical works those who had not escaped before our men were upon them surrendered at once. The attack and capture of Gavrelle, which broke the Oppy line, was the best thing done on the left of the attack. This is important ground for future operations.

Guémappe, to the south of the river, is the scene of the most severe attacks and counter-attacks; and it is clear that the enemy sets a great price on this heap of bricks, because of its position on the Cambrai road. Before this morning it has

been the scene of fierce encounters; and to-day the 3rd Bavarian Division (which has taken the place of the 18th Division, at whom they had jeered for losing so many prisoners in recent battles) is at close quarters with our men; and round about the village there is deadly hand-to-hand fighting. The trenches here are full of Germans, and the enemy has sent up supports.

The 101st Pomeranian Regiment, belonging to the 35th Reserve Division, surrendered in solid masses to our men in the neighbourhood of Fontaine-lez-Croisilles. For several days they had suffered under our bombardment, and it so shook their nerve that as soon as our troops advanced they came out of their dug-outs in the support trenches—the front line was not held at all—and gave themselves to our men in blocks of 500 without any attempt to fight. On this ground between the Cojeul and Sensée rivers, where our advance was on a curved line following the shape of the rising ground, we took at least 1200 prisoners and a battery of field-guns.

It is fortunate—in counting the high price of the battle—that many of our wounded are only lightly touched by shrapnel and machine-gun bullets. I saw these walking wounded coming back; tired, brave men, who bore their pain with most stoic endurance, so that there was hardly a groan to be heard among them. Now and again overhead was the shrill whine of an approaching shell, "Whistling Percy" by name, but they paid no heed after their great escape from the far greater peril. They formed up in a long queue outside the dressing-station, where doctors waited for them, and where there was a hot drink to be had. They were covered with mud, and were too weary and spent to talk. That long line of silent, wounded men will always remain in my memory.

Outside in the sunlight, waiting their turn to enter the dressing-station, some of the men lay down on the bank in queer, distorted attitudes very like death, and slept there. Others came hobbling with each arm round the neck of the stretcher-bearers, or led forward blind, gropingly. It was the whimper of these blind boys and the agony on their faces which was most tragic in all this tragedy, those and the men smashed about the face and head so that only their eyes stared through white masks. Near by were German prisoners standing against the sunlit wall, pale, sick, and hungry-looking men, utterly

dejected. A German aeroplane flew overhead on the way behind our lines, shot at all the way by our anti-aircraft guns, but very bold. Our kite-balloons, white as snow-clouds in the blue sky, stared over the battlefield where our men are still fighting in the midst of great shell-fire.

APRIL 25

THIS battle which is still in progress east of Arras is developing rather like the early days of the Somme battles, when our men fought stubbornly to gain or regain a few hundred yards of trenches in which the enemy resisted under the cover of great gun-fire, and to which he sent up strong bodies of supporting troops to drive our men out by counter-attacks. In the ground east of Monchy, between the Scarpe and the Sensée rivers, the situation is exactly like that, and, as I said yesterday, the line of battle has ebbed to and fro in an astounding way, British and German troops fighting forwards and backwards over the same ground with alternating success.

An attack made by Scottish troops of the 15th Division yesterday afternoon, and by English troops of the 29th at 3.30 this morning, re-established our line on this side of the two woods called Bois du Vert and Bois du Sart, and on the farther side of Guémappe. Parties of British troops who had been cut off and were believed to be in the hands of the enemy were recovered yesterday, having held out in a most gallant way in isolated positions. Among them were some of the Argylls and men of the Middlesex Regiment. Our barrage preceding an infantry attack actually swept over them, and they gave themselves up for lost, but escaped from the British shells and the German shells which burst all round them and seemed in competition for their lives.

A similar case happened with a party of Worcester men recovered last night. They were cut off in a small copse, and lay quiet there for several days, surrounded by the enemy. They had their iron rations with them, and lived on these until they were gone. They were then starving and suffering great agony from lack of water. But still they would not surrender, and last night were rewarded for their endurance by seeing the enemy retire before the advancing waves of English troops.

The enemy is suffering big losses, but is replacing them each time by fresh battalions. The Fourth Division of the Prussian

Guards has now been brought up against us, among several other new divisions. They continue to show determination to hold us back from a nearer approach to the Hindenburg line in spite of the frightful casualties already suffered. There have been no fewer than eight counter-attacks already upon the village of Gavrelle, and not one of them has reached our men, but they have been broken and dispersed.

In the first counter-attack upon our line opposite Monchy, between 2000 and 3000 Germans left the Bois du Vert, but after many hundreds had fallen retired to reorganize. The second attack was in greater numbers and rolled back our line for a time, but has now been forced to retire to its old position in the woods, which we keep continually under intense fire, so that much slaughter must be there.

Our guns never cease their labouring night and day, and are shelling the enemy's infantry positions, batteries, lines of communication, rail-heads, and cross-roads, so that no troops may move except under the menace of death or mutilation. Nevertheless, faced by great peril to his main defensive lines, the enemy is massing troops rapidly for battle on even a bigger scale. Our own men are passing through fiery ordeals with that courage which is now known to the whole world, so that I need not labour to describe it—a patient courage in great hardships, self-sacrifice in the midst of great perils, sane and unbroken in spite of horrors upon which the imagination dare not dwell.

From the colonel of the Worcesters of the 29th Division I heard to-day a narrative which would surely make the angels weep, but though just out of the infernal ordeal he told it calmly, and his hand only trembled slightly as he pointed on his trench-map to positions which his men had taken and where they had most suffered. His story deals with only a small section of the battle front, and all the fighting which he directed had for its object certain trenches which would mean nothing if I gave their names. (They were Strong and Windmill Trench.)

His battalion headquarters were in a dug-out actually in the front trench line from which his men attacked, and it was lucky, for after the troops had gone forward the enemy's barrage fell behind them and destroyed the ground. The colonel, with his adjutant, his sergeant-major, and his servant, shared this battle headquarters with the commanding officer and staff of the Hampshires, but not for long. Heavy German

crumps were smashing round them, and the enemy's barrage-fire swept up and down searching for human life. The colonel of the Hampshires was wounded, and two of his officers were killed. The colonel of the Worcesters, who was left to record this history, could tell very little of what was happening to his men there in the battle less than a thousand yards away. A wounded sergeant came back and said that the left company was holding out against German counter-attacks. Later two young officers came back to Pick-and-Shrapnel Trench with a party of men and said they had been ordered to retire by a strange captain. The colonel rallied the men, and they went back and retook Windmill Trench near by. Messages came down that men were half mad for lack of water. The colonel sent up water by a carrying-party, but he believes that they delivered it to the enemy, who had crept up through the darkness which had now fallen. All through the day on each side of this Worcestershire colonel great bodies of troops were fighting forward under intense shell-fire. He saw the enemy's massed counter-attacks slashed by our shrapnel and machine-gun fire, and our field-batteries galloping to forward positions, but he could see nothing of his own men after they had once gone forward down the sloping ground. His runners were killed or fell senseless from shell-shock. He himself was buried by a shell and dug out again by his sergeant-major. In the night he was left quite alone, surrounded by dead.

That is one experience in the great battle, and thousands of our men endured and are enduring dreadful things in the fierce fighting and under intense fire. Once out of it, they are calm and self-controlled, as I saw many of them to-day just as they had been relieved, and the strongest expression they use is, "It is very hot, sir," or "I didn't think I should come back."

The wounded are marvellous. The lightly wounded have a long way to walk, hobbling for miles down unsafe roads. Many of them walked back through Monchy when it was a flaming torch. Weary and dazed they came to the casualty clearing-station, not even now beyond the range of shell-fire, so that men who have escaped from the battlefields, waiting to have their wounds dressed, hear the old shrill whistle of the approaching menace, but do not care. It is only by such courage that our men can gain any ground from the enemy, and it is such courage that beats back all those heavy counter-

attacks which the enemy is now hurling against us up by Gavrelle and by Monchy-on-the-Hill.

VIII

THE BACKGROUND OF BATTLE

April 30

There has been but little time lately to describe the scene of war or to chronicle the small human episodes of this great battle between Lens and St.-Quentin, with its storm-centre at Arras, where men are fighting in mass, killing in mass, dying in mass. Some day one of our soldiers now fighting—some young man with a gift of words—will write for all time the story of all this: the beauty and the ugliness and the agony of it, the colour and the smell and the movement of it, with intimate and passionate remembrance. It is a memorable battle-picture in modern history, and in the mass of hundreds of thousands of men, obedient to the high command, which uses them as parts of the great war machine, is the individual with his own separate experience and initiative, with his sense of humour and his suffering, and his courage and his fear.

The scene of battle has changed during these last few days because spring has come at last, and warm sunshine. It has made a tremendous difference to the look of things, and to the sense of things. A week ago our men were marching through rain and sleet, through wild quagmire of old battlefields which stretch away behind our new front lines, through miles of shell-craters and dead woods and destroyed villages. They fought wet and fought cold, and their craving was for hot drink. Yesterday, after a few days of warmth, our troops on the march were powdered white with dust, and they fought hot and fought thirsty, and the wounded cried for water to cool their burning throats. Men going up to the lines in lorries stared out through masks of dust which made them look like pierrots. Their steel helmets, upon which rain pattered a week ago, were like millers' hats. More frightful now, even than in the worst days of winter, is the way up to the Front. In all that broad stretch of desolation we have left behind us the shell-craters which were full of water, red water and green water, are now dried up, and are hard, deep pits, scooped out

of powdered earth, from which all vitality has gone, so that spring brings no life to it. I thought perhaps some of these shell-slashed woods would put out new shoots when spring came, and watched them curiously for any sign of rebirth, but there is no sign, and their poor, mutilated limbs, their broken and tattered trunks, stand naked under the blue sky. Everything is dead with a white, ghastly look in the brilliant sunshine except where here and there in the litter of timber and brickwork which marks the site of a French village, a little bush is in bud, or flowers blossom in a scrap-heap which was once a garden. All this is the background of our present battle, and through this vast stretch of barren country our battalions move slowly forward to take their part in the battle when their turn comes, resting a night or two among the ruins where other men who work always behind the lines, road-mending, wiring, on supply columns, at ammunition dumps, in casualty clearing-stations and rail-heads, have made their billets on the lee side of broken walls or in holes dug deep by the enemy and reported safe for use. Dead horses lie on the roadsides or in shell-craters. I passed a row of these poor beasts as though all had fallen down and died together in a last comradeship. Dead Germans, or bits of dead Germans, lie in old trenches, and these fields are the graveyards of Youth.

Farther forward the earth is green again in strips. The bombardment has not yet torn it and pitted it, and the shell-craters are scarcer and their sloping sides are fresh. One gets to know the date of a crater, and its freshness is a warning sign that the enemy's guns dislike this patch of ground and anything that may live there. So it is that one gets close to the present fighting, and now under this first sunshine of the year there is a strange and terrible beauty in the battle-picture.

I watched our shelling of the Hindenburg line at Quéant from the ground by Lagnicourt, where the Australians slaughtered the enemy in the recent counter-attack. White as fleecy clouds in the sky was the smoke of our shrapnel bursts, and there was the glinting and flashing of shells above the enemy's trench, which wound like a tape on the slope of the rising ground above the village of Quéant, and through the fringe of trees below. A storm of shells broke over Bullecourt to the left, and the enemy was answering back with 5·9's, searching the valley which runs down from Noreuil, as I watched

it while it was under fire. The Germans were barraging the crest of the hill, with their universal-shell bursting high with black oily clouds. One of our aeroplanes had fallen, and the enemy's gunners in the Hindenburg line tried to destroy it by long-range sniping. Our own guns were firing steadily, so that the sky was filled with invisible flights of shells, and always there came down the humming song of our aeroplanes, and their wings were dazzling and diaphanous as they were caught by the sun's rays. That is the picture one sees now along any part of our line, but the adventure of the men inside the smoke-drifts is more human in its aspect.

It was a queer scene when the Australians went into Lagnicourt. Some Germans were still hiding in their dug-outs, and the Australian troops searched for them with fixed bayonets. In some of these hiding-places they found great stores of German beer, and it was a good find for men thirsty and glad of a smoke. So this mopping-up battalion, as it is called, mopped up the beer, which was very light and refreshing, and, with fat cigars between their teeth, a bottle of beer in one hand and a bayonet ready in the other, continued their hunt for prisoners. During the fighting hereabouts 200 German soldiers came across under the white flag as a sign of surrender, but they were seen by their own machine-gunners, who shot them down without mercy. So one gets comedy and tragedy hand-in-hand here, and, indeed, the whole tale of this fighting on the way to Quéant is a mixture of gruesome horror and fantastic mirth, which makes men laugh grimly when telling the tale of it.

I went about three days ago over the battlefield with a young Australian officer, a gallant man and a quick walker, who was the first to get news of the enemy's attack. He was at headquarters, awake but sleepy, in the small hours of morning.

Presently the telephone bell tinkled. "Hallo," said the Australian officer, and yawned. A small voice spoke: "The enemy has broken through. He has got to Lagnicourt."

"What's that?" said the officer at the 'phone. It seemed a silly joke at such an hour. The message was repeated, and my friend was very wide awake, and what happened afterwards was very rapid.

The Australian Gunner-General gave orders to stop up the

gaps in the German wire through which the enemy had come. They were closed by shell-fire. The attacking column, having failed in time to destroy the field-guns, tried to escape, but found their retreat cut off. Three thousand of them suffered appalling casualties, and I saw some of their dead bodies lying on the ground three days ago, though most have now been buried.

On another part of the line held by the English troops a queer bird was captured the other day. It was a blue bird in the form of a German officer wearing a gay uniform, with a big cloak and spurs, brought down by one of our airmen. He seemed sleepy when caught, and yawned politely behind a closed hand, and explained the cause of his unfortunate appearance behind our lines. It appears that the commanding officer of his air squadron at Cambrai went on leave, and his officers and other friends consoled themselves by drinking good red wine. In the morning, after a late night, they decided to go out on reconnaissance; and the officer in the sky-blue cloak agreed that he also would make a flight, and so perform his duty to the Fatherland. A pilot took him up; but, instead of making a reconnaissance, he fell fast asleep and saw nothing of a British aeroplane swooping upon him from a high cloud. A bullet in the petrol-tank drove down the German machine, and the officer in the sky-blue cloak stepped out, saluted, surrendered, and a little later fell asleep again.

An air prisoner is always more noticeable than the batches of infantry who come back to our lines after one of our attacks, but there was something unusual in the sight of seventy-three Germans led by a young English soldier from the zone of fire in this latest fighting. Our man was a young private of Suffolks, chubby-faced and small in body, though of a high spirit.

"What are you doing with those men?" asked an officer. "Why isn't there a proper escort?"

"They are my prisoners," said the boy; "they have just surrendered to me, and I'm taking them back to our camp."

During attacks near Monchy one of our young officers was lying in a shell-hole with a thin line of men, mostly wounded. Presently a Tank crawled up, and a voice spoke from it: "That's a hot spot of yours. You had better come inside for a bit."

"How shall I get in?" said the young infantry officer.

A voice from the Tank said: "Come round to this side." The young officer climbed in through a hole, and said "Thanks very much" to the Tank officer, who drove him close to the enemy's line, enabled him to see the position, and then brought him back to his shell-hole.

These things are happening on the field of battle, and there are many of our officers and men who have such fantastic experiences, and tell them as though they were normal adventures of life.

IX

HOW THE SCOTS TOOK GUÉMAPPE

MAY 1

BIRDS are singing their spring songs on this May Day in the woods very close to where men are fighting, and the fields on the edge of the shell-crater country are yellow with cowslips, so that war seems more hateful than ever, when the earth is so good, and all the colour and scent of it. But the work of war goes on whatever the weather. To-day, as well as yesterday, the enemy's chief targets were Arleux, captured by the Canadians, and Guémappe, which fell to Scottish troops, both of which places he has tried to take back by repeated and violent counter-attacks. He is still in a trench on the east side of Guémappe, running down to a bit of ruin called Cavalry Farm, where there has been close fighting for several days since the great battle on April 23, when Guémappe was taken by the Scots of the 15th Division.

That battle round Guémappe is a great episode in the history of the Scottish troops in France. It was fighting which lasted for nearly a week after the hour of attack in the first daylight of April 23. At that hour long waves of the Seaforths, Black Watch, and Camerons left the trenches they had dug under shell-fire, and went forward towards Guémappe. They were faced at once by blasts of machine-gun fire, and although our artillery barrage crashed across the field some of the German strong points were still held in force. At one, about which I know most, there was a gap between the Seaforths and Camerons owing to the feeble light of the dawn, in which men could only dimly see, but this was filled up by some companies of the Black Watch. For nearly three hours the

Scots were held up by the fire of German machine-guns and artillery, and suffered many casualties, but they fought on, each little group of men acting with separate initiative, and it is to their honour as soldiers that they destroyed every machine-gun post in front of them. One sergeant of the Black Watch fought his way down a bit of trench alone and knocked out the gun-crew so that the line could advance. Two hundred prisoners were taken in that first forward sweep, when the Seaforths advanced in long lines and went through and beyond the village of Guémappe with loud shouts and cheers. They were checked again by machine-gun fire from many different directions, and immediately from the ruin called Cavalry Farm ahead of them. This was afterwards cleared, and many Germans lie dead there. Then between eleven and twelve in the morning the enemy developed his first counter-attack. He massed masses of men in the valley below Guémappe, flung a storm of shells on to the village, and then sent forward his troops to work round the spur on which the Highlanders held their line. It was then that the Camerons and Black Watch showed their fierce and stubborn fighting spirit. They tore rents in the lines of advancing Bavarians with Lewis-gun and rifle-grenade fire, and the enemy's losses were great, so that the supporting troops passed over lines of dead comrades. But the attack was pressed by strong bodies of men, and the thin lines of the Scots, exhausted by long hours of fighting, were forced to swing back.

We now know that first reports were wrong, when it was said that the enemy retook Guémappe for a time. He never set foot in it again, though the Scottish line fell back. Little groups of Highland officers and men refused to retreat. Some of them held the cemetery and defended it against all attacks. A captain of the Black Watch with seventy men remained in the north of the village for four hours, though they had no protection on either flank. One officer and twelve men of the Camerons at another spot refused to leave during the retirement, and were found still holding out when their comrades renewed their attack and regained the ground. Another officer of the Camerons lost all the men of his machine-gun team, but brought up the gun himself and worked it with another officer already wounded. Afterwards, to save ammunition, he sniped the

enemy with their own rifles which they had dropped on the field. Later the village of Guémappe was isolated, for our artillery bombardment prevented all approach by the enemy. Then another brigade of Scots streamed round by the north of the village, and the whole line of Highland troops swept back the enemy. By that time the Bavarian troops had no more fight in them, and knew they were beaten. They retired in great disorder, leaving great numbers of dead and wounded.

For a day and a half the Scots were able to rest a little, though always under shell-fire; but afterwards there was fierce patrol fighting round Cavalry Farm and in outposts near by. The enemy's fire was intense, and he commanded this position from the high ground to the north, but small parties of Scots held on doggedly outside the ruins of the farm until, after five days, they were withdrawn.

I have told all this briefly; but, even so, I hope it may reveal a little of the stubborn courage with which those men refused to give way, and when forced back for a few hours after great losses, regained the ground they had captured with a spirit which belongs to the history of their fighting clans.

X

THE OPPY LINE

MAY 2

THERE have been no strong infantry attacks along our front to-day, none of any kind as far as I know. It has been a day for the guns alone, and as my ears could bear witness, and every nerve in my body, they have made the most of it under the blue sky. All our batteries were hard at work, heavy howitzers with broad blunt snouts, long-muzzled long-ranged 60-pounders, and farther forward, on the landscape of the battlefield, field-guns drumming out salvos with staccato knocks above the full deep blasts of the monsters behind them.

Somehow in this bright sunlight, flooding all the countryside with a golden haze and painting the fields with vivid colour—yellow where the new shell-holes had dug deep pits, red-brown where it had lain quiet since the war, emerald-green where strips of grass grew between the plots of barbed wire and a

tangle of old trenches—on such a day as this, with a light wind driving fleecy clouds through the sky, and wild flowers like little stars at one's feet, and larks singing with a high ecstasy, war and blood and death seemed abominably out of place. Yet they were there all three, round about Oppy and Gavrelle, and on the ground below Bailleul, thrust before one's eyes, rising to one's nostrils, making hideous noises about one. It would have been so much better in such a May as this to stroll on the way to Oppy, in this first sunshine of the year, without a thought of what men might be watching. But when, standing on the crest above, I showed half my body above a bit of earth, an officer who lives below the earth said, "It's better to keep down. The blighters can see us all right."

And to stroll into Oppy one must have many machine-guns with one, and be preceded by a storm of heavy shells, making a steel wall before one. One day soon, I suppose, our men will go in again like that, to find a litter of men's bodies, some living men trembling in cellars, and another little bit of hell. We were making a hell of it to-day for any young Germans there. Our guns made good target practice of it, flinging up rosy clouds of dust from its ruins of red brick. But one house still stands in Oppy Wood. It is a big white château, which is clearly visible with empty windows and broken roofs through a thin fringe of dead trees. A sinister ghostly place, even at broad noonday, and no man alive would sit alone there in its big salon unless he had gone mad with shell-shock, for that white house is another target for guns, and while I watched our shells crashed through the trees about it.

Below Oppy, where our men fought a few days ago, is Gavrelle, which is ours, above Greenland Hill, where there is a broken village among the trees, from which we can look down across the River Scarpe. To the left of Oppy is Arleux-en-Gohelle, recently captured by Canadians, who fought through its streets, and to the southern side of it is the ruin of a sugar factory, 500 yards or so from the outskirts of Bailleul, an old grey place, with broken walls and roofs, and a railway station with a deep embankment. These places were targets for the German guns, especially Arleux and Bailleul railway station, and heavy crumps came whining and then crashing, and flinging up clouds of black smoke—as black and as big as the evil genii that came from the bottle and played the devil.

The enemy's guns were very active to-day, as our communiqué would say. But one of our forward observing officers, a young man in a dusty ditch, with a telescope and a telephone, and a steel hat which is only a faith cure for heavy shell-fire, was chuckling over this morning's business.

"It was very funny," he said. "The Boche started counter-battery work, but we answered back too quick, and knocked out one of his batteries smack in the eye. That group has kept quiet since then."

He pointed to some broken things lying about the field outside Oppy, and said: "The aeroplanes have been dropping about a good deal. There has been some very hot work in this part of the sky." The sky above us then was full of the throb and hum of aeroplanes, and to the tune of them birds went on singing, but other birds, invisible, sang louder than the larks, with high, shrill, whistling cries which make one feel cold and crouch low if they sing too close overhead. So the battle of guns went on, and troops, marching over dusty ground pock-marked with shell-craters, all white and barren, between belts of rusty wire, paid no heed to bursting crumps, and in the new-made craters or in old trenches, or in special holes just dug for shelter, sat down out of the wind and cooked their food, and slept so much like other bodies who will never wake, that once or twice I thought they were dead, these single figures sprawling in the dust, with sand-bags for their pillows. Away on the sky-line were a few dim towers faintly pencilled against the golden haze, and one taller than the others standing apart.

"Douai," said a gunner officer. Yes; it was Douai, old in history and full of ancient buildings, which hold many memories of faith and scholarship and peace. The tall, lone tower which I saw was the great belfry of Douai. It seemed very far away, with the German lines on this side of it; but I remember how I used to see the clock-tower of Bapaume (no longer standing, alas!) as far and dim as this, so that it seemed as though we should never fight our way to it. But one day I walked into Bapaume with the Australian troops, who had entered it that morning. And so one day we may walk into Douai, if luck is with us.

XI

THE BATTLE OF MAY 3

MAY 3

ANOTHER day of close, fierce, difficult fighting is now in progress, having begun early this morning in the darkness and going on down a long front in hot sunshine and dust and the smoke of innumerable shells.

Among the battalions engaged were the Royal Scots, East Yorks, Shropshire Light Infantry, the Norfolks, Suffolks, East Kents and West Kents, Royal Fusiliers, East Surreys, Worcesters, Hampshires, King's Own Scottish Borderers, East Lancs and South Lancs, Gloucesters, Argylls, Seaforths and Black Watch, and the Middlesex and London Regiments. They belonged to the 3rd, 12th, 37th, 29th, 17th, 15th, and 56th Divisions.

At many points our troops have succeeded in getting forward in spite of great resistance from fresh German regiments and intense artillery-fire. The most important gains of the day are in the direction of the village of Chérisy, where ground has been won by English battalions, and round Bullecourt by the Australians with Devons and Gordons on their left.

This thrusts the enemy by Fontaine-lez-Croisilles, where he is still holding out, into a narrow pointed salient, which should be utterly untenable. The way to Chérisy was taken rapidly by men of the West Kents and East Surreys of the 18th Division without any serious check, although there was savage machine-gun fire. At Fontaine-lez-Croisilles our men found it very difficult to get forward owing to the strength of the enemy's defences south of the wood, and an abominable barrage of heavy shell-fire. They bombed their way down 600 yards of trench, and established themselves round Fontaine Wood on the north-west side of the village.

Farther north fighting carried our line out from Guémappe towards St.-Rohart Factory, just above Vis-en-Artois, but signal rockets sent up here by our men may only come from advanced posts ahead of the main line.

South of the Scarpe, between Monchy and those two woods of ill repute, the Bois du Vert and Bois du Sart, the battle has

been similar to other struggles over the same ground, where the enemy stares across to our lines from good cover and has every inch of earth registered by his guns, with a clear field of fire for his machine-guns, of which he has got numbers in enfilade positions. English and Scottish battalions attacked here this morning, and would not give way under the terrific fire, but fought forward in small bodies until they gained the line on the crest of Infantry Hill and 300 yards short of the two woods, now linked together by the Germans with belts of wire and well-dug trenches.

North of the River Scarpe there is great fighting round Rœux, Gavrelle, and Oppy by the Household Battalion, Seaforths, Royal Irish Fusiliers, Warwicks, South African Scottish of the 4th, 9th, and 6th Divisions, and other English and Scottish battalions.

Gavrelle has already been the scene of many attacks and counter-attacks. It was here that in the fighting last month the enemy advanced time after time in close waves, only to be scythed down by our machine-guns, so that heaps of those field-grey dead lie out there on the barren land. To-day those dead were joined by many comrades. When our men advanced they were met by masses of Germans, and once more the line of battle had an ebb and flow, and both sides passed over the dead and wounded in assault and retirement. Four times an old windmill beyond the village changed hands. Four times the Germans who had dislodged our men were cut to pieces and thrust out. Men are fighting here as though these bits of brick and wood are worth a king's ransom or a world's empire, and in a way they are worth that, for the windmill of Gavrelle is one point which will decide a battle or a series of battles upon which the fate of two Empires is at stake. So it happens in this war that a dust-heap like that other windmill at Pozières in the crisis of the Somme battles becomes for hours or days the prize of victory or the symbol of defeat.

In Oppy, above Gavrelle, which I described yesterday as I saw it in the golden haze, the Germans there, whom I could not see, have been very busy. They knew this attack was coming; it was clear that it must come to them, and at night they worked hard to protect themselves, fear being their taskmaster. They made machine-gun emplacements not only in pits and trenches, but in branches of many trees, and wired

themselves in with many twisted strands. The Second Guards Reserve, newly brought up, held the village and wood and the white château, with its empty windows and broken roofs, and kept below the ground when our gun-fire stormed above them. So when our men attacked in that pale darkness of a May night they found themselves at once in a hail of machine-gun bullets, and later under shell-fire, which made a fury about them. They penetrated into Oppy Wood, but owing to the massed German troops, who counter-attacked fiercely, they did not go far into the wood or lose themselves in such a death-trap. They were withdrawn to the outskirts of Oppy, so that our guns could get at the enemy and drive him below ground again.

Northwards we stormed and won long trenches running up from Oppy to Arleux, and most necessary for further progress, linking up with the Canadians, who made a great and successful attack upon the village of Fresnoy, just south of Acheville.

That was certainly a very gallant feat in face of many difficulties of ground and most savage fire. They completely surrounded the village and caught its garrison in a trap from which they had no escape. After brief fighting with bombs and bayonets the survivors surrendered, to the number of eight officers and about 200 men belonging to the Fifteenth Reserve Division of Prussians. What made them sick and sorry men is that two of their battalions had just arrived in high spirits, having troops in front of them who were weak, they had been told, and they were ordered to attack Arleux this morning. The Canadians attacked first, and by six o'clock these Prussians were sadder and wiser men. The prisoners escaped our shell-fire, but were nearly done to death behind our lines by their own guns. I saw this incident this morning. They had been put in an enclosure, next to a Canadian field dressing-station flying the Red Cross, when suddenly the enemy's guns began to shell the area with five-point-nines. They burst again and again during half an hour with tremendous crashes and smoke-clouds.

"If those Germans are still there," said a Canadian, "there won't be much left of them."

When the shelling eased off I went towards their place but found it empty. As soon as the shelling started their guards hurried them away to safety farther back behind the lines, and the Canadian wounded were diverted to another route. One

of these Prussian officers was shown his old lines captured on April 9, and he asked what regiment had done such gallant work. "The Canadians did it," he was told, "and the same fellows that captured Fresnoy this morning." The Prussian officer could hardly believe it, but when he was convinced of its truth he complimented the Canadian troops who had fought so hard and so far. They were proud young officers, and when I spoke to one or two they would not admit that they had been mastered in this war. They seem to have an unbounded faith in Hindenburg's genius, and in the effects of submarine warfare.

I found no such spirit among the non-commissioned officers and men. They spoke as men under an evil spell, hating the war, but seeing no end to it. "Neither side will win," said one of them, "but who will stop it? The papers write about the conditions of peace, but one party says one thing and one party says another, and we don't know what to believe."

I asked them about the Russian revolution, and whether it had any influence in the German trenches, but they seemed to have heard of it only as a vague, far-off event, not affecting their own lives and ideas. They were more interested about their food, and said their bread ration had been reduced by one-third. Behind the lines the scene of war to-day was on white, dusty plains under the glare of the sun, where men waiting to go into battle slept beside their arms, where mules kicked and rolled beside heavy batteries and transport. Guns were thundering close, and hostile shells were bursting among the tents and kinema pavilions, and a band was playing. No sane man would believe it unless he saw it with his own eyes and heard it with his own ears, for it was all fantastic as a nightmare of war, with wounded men hobbling back from the bloody strife and wending their way through the old trenches, in which other men sat polishing rifles, or whistling in tune with the band.

MAY 21

BEFORE darkness, when the shadows were lengthening across the fields and the glow of the evening sun was warm on the white walls of the French cottages, I went into an old village to meet some men who have just come out of the fires of hate. They were the East Kents of the 12th Division, whom I met

last, months ago now, during the battle of the Somme, where they had hard fighting and tragic losses. In the twilight and dusk and darkness I heard their tales of battle—the things these men had done just a little while ago before coming down to this village of peace—tales of frightful hours, of life in the midst of death, of English valour put to the most bloody and cruel tests.

Men of Kent and boys of Kent. There was one boy with black eyes sitting with his tunic off on the window-sill above a terraced porch who seemed too young to be one of the King's officers, and is no more than nineteen, but ninety in the experience of life and death. He told me how he was sent up with some signallers to keep touch with his company, who had gone forward in the attack at Monchy in the darkness before daybreak on the morning of May 3. He lost his way, as other men did, because of the darkness, and found his men being hit by machine-gun bullets. He put them into shell-holes, and worked from one hole to the other, dodging the heavy crumps which flung the earth up about them, and the more deadly sweep of bullets. When the first glimmer of dawn came he met a man of his company bringing down two prisoners, and heard that the objective had been taken. It seemed good news and good evidence. The young officer pushed on with what men were with him, and presently saw a body of men ahead of him. Our fellows, he thought, and signalled to them. He thought it queer that they didn't answer his signals, but waved their caps in reply. He thought it more queer that they were wearing overcoats, and he was sure his company had gone forward without coats. But if those were not his men, where were they? That was where they ought to be, or farther forward. He went forward a little way, uneasy and doubtful, until all doubts were solved. Those men waving caps to him, beckoning him forward, were Germans. The enemy had got behind our men, who were cut off. It was a narrow escape for this boy of nineteen, and he had others before he got back with a few men, sniped all the way by the enemy on the hill-side. It was worse for men who had been fighting forward there. They had gone over the ground quickly to the first goal, though many had lost their way in darkness and many had fallen. Then the enemy had dribbled in from positions on each side of them and closed up behind them. The East Kents were cut off, like other men of other regiments

fighting alongside. Many officers were picked off by snipers or hit by shells and machine-gun fire. Second lieutenants found themselves in command of companies, sergeants and corporals and privates became leaders of small groups of men. The Buffs were cut off, but did not surrender. One young officer was the only one left with his company. He cheered up the men and said it was up to the Buffs to hold out as long as possible, and they built cover by linking up shell-holes and making a defensive position. Three times the enemy attacked in heavy numbers, determined to get their men, but each time they were beaten off by machine-gun fire and bombs. Fifteen hours passed like this, and then night came, and with it grave and dreadful anxiety to the officer with what remained of the company of men who looked to him for leadership. There were no more bombs. If another attack came, nothing could stop it.

"We must fight our way back," said the second lieutenant. Between them and their own lines were two German trenches full of the enemy. It would not be easy to hack a way through. But the East Kents left their shell-holes, scrambled up into the open, and, with the second lieutenant leading, stumbled forward through the darkness as stealthily as possible to the German lines between them and our old positions. Then they sprang into the enemy's trench, bayoneting or clubbing the sentries. A German officer came out of a dug-out with a sword, which is an unusual weapon in a trench, but before he could use it our second lieutenant shot him with his revolver. So to the next trench, and so through again to a great escape.

There were other officers and men who had to fight desperately for life, like this. Young Kentish lads behaved with fine and splendid bravery. A private belonging to a machine-gun team remained alone in a shell-hole when all his comrades were killed, and stayed there for three days, keeping his gun in action until relieved by our advancing troops. Three days had passed when he rejoined his unit, and they, after a brief rest, were moving forward again to the front line. The escaped man was given the offer of remaining behind, but he said, "Thanks, but I'll go up along, with the rest of the chaps," and back he went.

Another young private saw his company commander fall by

his side. The stretcher-bearers had not yet come up to that spot, though all through the battle they did most noble work; and this private soldier was desperate to get help for his officer. He resolved to make the enemy help him, and went forward to where he saw Germans. By some menace of death in his eyes, he quelled them—six of them—into surrender, and, bringing them back as prisoners, made them carry the young officer back to the dressing-station, so saving his life. I have told the story of the Buffs, or a brief glimpse of it, and they will forgive me when I add that what they have done has been done also by other English battalions, not with greater valour but with as great, in many battles and in these now being fought. Our English troops, through no fault of mine, get but little praise or fame though they are the backbone of the Army, and are in all our great attacks. The boys of England, like those of its garden county of Kent, have poured out their blood on these fields of France, and have filled the history of this appalling war with shining deeds.

XII

FIELDS OF GOLD

MAY 23

THE beauty of these May days is so intense and wonderful after the cold, grey weather and sudden rush of spring that men are startled by it, and find it outrageously cruel that death and blood and pain should be thrust into such a setting. Once in history two fat kings met in a field of France, between silken tents and on strips of tapestry laid upon the grass, so that this scene of glitter and shimmer was called for every age of schoolboys "The Field of the Cloth of Gold." Out here in France now there is a field of honour, stretching for more than a hundred miles, held by British soldiers; and that is a true field of cloth of gold, for everywhere behind the deep belt of cratered land, so barren and blasted that no seed of life is left in the soil, there are miles of ground where gold grows, wonderfully brilliant in the warm sunshine of these days. It is the gold of densely growing dandelions and of buttercups in great battalions. They cover the wreckage of old trenches, and bloom in patches of ground between powdered fragments of

brick- and stone-work which are still called by the names of old villages swept off the face of the earth by fierce bombardments.

If you wish to picture our Army out here now, the landscape in which our men are fighting—and they like to think you want to do so—you must think of them marching along roads sweet-scented with lilac and apple-blossom, and over those golden fields to the white edge of the dead land. They are hot under heavy packs all powdered with dust, so that they wear white masks like a legion of Pierrots, and on their steel helmets the sun shines brazenly. But there is a soft breeze blowing, and as they march through old French villages showers of tiny white petals are blown upon them from the wayside orchards like confetti at a wedding feast, though it is for this dance of death called war. And these hot, dusty soldiers of ours, closed about by guns and mule teams and transport columns surging ceaselessly along the highways to the Front, drink in with their eyes cool refreshing shadows of green woods set upon hill-sides where the sun plays upon the new leaves with a melody of delicate colour-music, and spreads tapestries of light and shade across sweeps of grass-land all interwoven with the flowers of France.

Our soldiers do not walk blindly through this beauty. It calls to them, these men of Surrey and Kent and Devon, these Shropshire lads and boys of the Derbyshire dales, and at night in their camps, before turning in to sleep in the tents, they watch the glow of the western sun and the fading blue of the sky, and listen to the last song of birds tired with the joy of the day, and are drugged by the scent of closing flowers and of green wheat growing so tall, so quickly tall, behind the battle-fields. These tents are themselves like flowers in the darkness when candlelight gleams through their canvas, and at night the scene of war is lit up by star-shells and vivid flashes of light as great shells fall and burst beyond the zone of tents, where British soldiers crouch in holes and burrow deep into the earth. It is under the blue sky of these days, and in this splendour of spring-time, that English boys and young Scots go into the fires of hell, where quite close to them the birds still sing, as I heard the nightingale amidst the crash of gun-fire.

They were Shropshire lads of the King's Shropshire Light Infantry of the glorious 3rd Division, who helped to turn the tide of battle on one of these recent days when there was

savage fighting through several days and nights. The officer in command of one of their companies found the ruined village of Tilloy-les-Mufflains in front of him still held by the enemy when our troops assaulted it. They were working their machine-guns and raking another body of infantry.

"Come on, Shropshires," shouted the young officer, and his boys followed him. They worked round the flank of the village, cut off ninety of the enemy and captured them, and thereby enabled other troops to get forward. One of these Shropshire officers went out with only a few men 200 yards beyond the front line that night, and took twenty prisoners in a dug-out there.

Into that same village of Tilloy cleared by Shropshires an officer of the King's Own Liverpools, with a lance-corporal, dashed into a ruined house from which the enemy was sniping in a most deadly way, and brought out two officers and twenty-eight men as prisoners. It was a subaltern of the Suffolks who went out in daylight under frightful fire to reconnoitre the enemy's lines and brought back knowledge which saved many lives. On the night of May 3, when all the sky was blazing with fire, it was the Royal Scots of the 3rd Division who held part of the line against heavy counter-attacks. The men had been fighting against great odds. Many of them had fallen, and the wounded were suffering horribly. Thirst tortured them, not only the wounded but also the unwounded, and there was no chance of water coming up through the hellish barrage. No chance except for the gallantry of the adjutant of the Royal Scots away back at battle headquarters near Monchy, where heavy crumps were bursting. He guessed his men craved for water, and he risked almost certain death to take it to them, going through all the fire with a few carriers and by a miracle untouched. This same adjutant went out again across the battle-ground under heavy fire to reorganize an advanced signal-station where there were many dead and wounded, and all the lines were cut. It was a young second lieutenant of the Royal Fusiliers of the 3rd Division who took command of two companies when all the other officers had been killed or wounded, and so comforted the men that under his leadership they dug a line close to the German position east of Monchy, and all through the day and night of tragic fighting held it against strong attacks and under infernal shell-

fire. Day after day, night after night, our men are fighting like that. And when for a little while they are relieved and given a rest they come back across those fields of the cloth of gold, beyond those barren fields where so many of their comrades lie, and look around and take deep breaths and say, "By Jove, what perfect weather!" and become a little drunk with the beauty of this world of life, and hate the thought of death.

PART IV

THE BATTLE OF MESSINES

I

WYTSCHAETE AND MESSINES

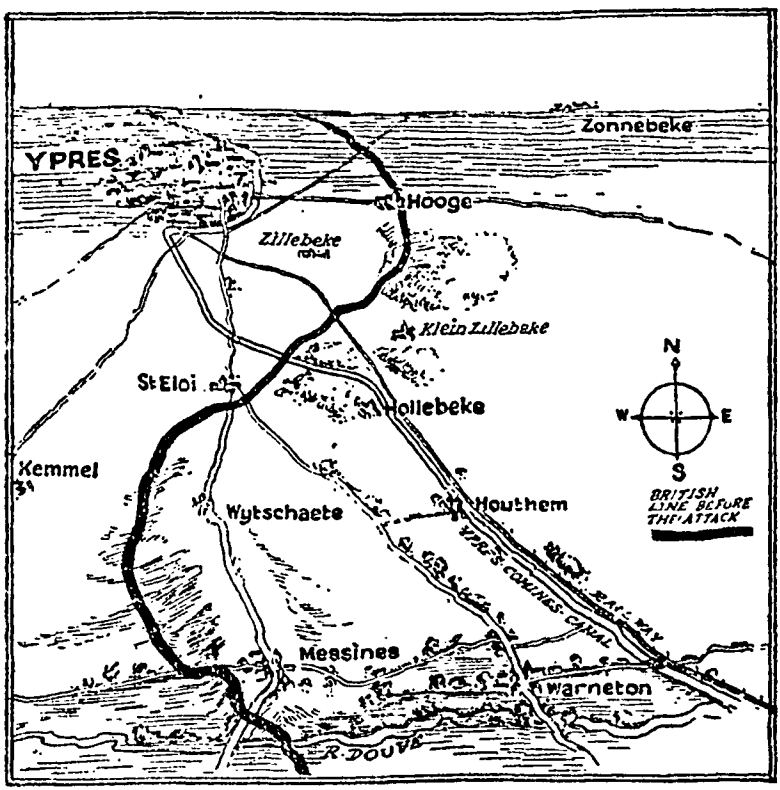
JUNE 7

AFTER the battle of Arras and all that fierce fighting which for two months has followed the capture of Vimy and the breaking of the Hindenburg line, and the taking of many villages, many prisoners, and many guns, by the valour and self-sacrifice of British troops, there began to-day at dawn another battle more audacious than that other one, because of the vast strength of the enemy's positions, and more stunning to the imagination because of the colossal material of destructive force gathered behind our assaulting troops. It is the battle of Messines.

It is my duty to write the facts of it, and to give the picture of it. That is not easy to a man who, after seeing the bombardments of many battles, has seen just now the appalling vision of massed gun-fire enormously greater in intensity than any of those, whose eyes are still dazed by a sky full of blinding lights and flames, and who has felt the tremor of earthquakes shaking the hill-sides, when suddenly, as a signal, the ground opened and mountains of fire rose into the clouds. There are no words which will help the imagination here. Neither by colour nor language nor sound could mortal man reproduce the picture and the terror and the tumult of this scene.

Our troops are now fighting forward through smoke and mist—English regiments, New-Zealanders, Protestant and Catholic Irishmen. Their Divisions from north to south were the 23rd, 47th (London), 41st, 19th, 16th (Irish), 36th (Ulster), 25th, New Zealand, and 3rd Australian. They

are fighting shoulder to shoulder in an invisible world, from which they are sending up light signals to show the progress they have made to the eyes of men flying high above the storm of battle, and to watchers in the country from which they went just as the faint rays of dawn flushed a moon-



LINE BEFORE THE BATTLE OF MESSINES

light sky. They have made good progress up the slopes of Wytschaete and Messines. Prisoners are already coming back with tales of how our men swept over them and beyond. So far it seems that the day goes well for us, but it is early in the day, and I must write later of what happens later on that ridge hidden behind the drifting clouds of smoke.

For two and a half years the Messines Ridge had been a curse

to all our men who have held the Ypres salient—a high barrier against them, behind which the enemy stacked his guns, shooting at them every kind of explosive, directed upon these troops of ours in the swamps of the Douve, in the broken woods of Ploegsteert, in all the flat ground north and west of Kemmel, by German observing officers very watchful behind their telescopes on that high ground which rises up from Wytschaete to Messines. In the early days of the war, before the enemy's grey legions had swept down through Belgium in a great devastating tide, some of our artillery and our cavalry rode along the hog's back of the ridge and held it for a time against the enemy's advanced patrols. On November 1, 1914, some of our guns were parked in the market square of Warneton beyond the ridge, and on the next day found a good target in German cavalry attacking from the woods, and held their fire until these mounted men were within a thousand yards of them, when riders and horses fell under a merciless storm of shrapnel. Many Germans died that day, but behind them was the vast army which came on like a rolling sea, beating back our ten divisions—those first ten wonderful divisions who fought against overwhelming odds and massed artillery which gave them no kind of chance. So we lost Wytschaete—Whitesheet, as our men have always called it—and the Messines Ridge, and not all our efforts could get it back again.

It is more than two years ago now—it was in March of 1915—that I saw an attack on Wytschaete, the first of our British bombardments which I watched after adventures in Belgium and France. Standing upon the same ground to-day, looking across the same stretch of battlefield, watching another attack up those frightful slopes, I thought back to that other day, upon that early demonstration of our artillery covering an infantry advance, and the remembrance was amazing in its contrast to this new battle in the dawn. Then our shrapnel barrage was a pretty ineffective thing—terrible as it seemed to me at the time. In those two years our gun-power has been multiplied enormously—by vast numbers of heavy guns and monstrous howitzers, and great quantities of field-guns—so that at daybreak this morning, before our men rose from their trenches to go forward in assault, the enemy's country up there was upheaved by a wild tornado of shell-fire, and the contours of the land were changed, and the sky opened and

poured down shrieking steel, and the earth was torn and let forth flame.

This battle of ours has started with such preparations as to ensure all but that last certainty of success which belongs to the incalculable fortune of war. It is not an exaggeration to say that they began a year ago, when miners began to tunnel under the slopes of Wytschaete and Messines, and laid enormous charges of ammonal, which at a touch on this day should blow up the hill-sides and alter the very geography of France. For a year Sir Herbert Plumer and his staff prepared their plans for this attack, gathered their material, and studied every detail of this business of great destruction. While other armies were fighting in the Somme, and all the world watched their conflict, the Second Army held the salient quietly, always on the defensive, not asking for more trouble than they had. They waited for their own offensive, and trained their own troops for it. A week ago they were ready, with railways, guns, Tanks, every kind of explosive, every kind of weapon which modern science has devised for the killing of men in great masses. A week ago all the guns that had been massing let loose their fire. Night and day for seven days it has continued with growing violence, working up to the supreme heights of fury as dawn broke to-day. For five days at least many Germans were pinned to their tunnels as prisoners of fire. No food reached them; there was no way out through these zones of death. A new regiment which tried to come up last night was broken and shattered. A prisoner says that out of his own company he lost fifty to sixty men before reaching the line. For a long way behind the line our heavy guns laid down belts of shell-fire, and many of the enemy's batteries kept silent.

Our gunners smothered his batteries whenever he revealed them to the airmen. Those flying men have been wonderful. A kind of exaltation of spirits took possession of them, and they dared great risks and searched out the enemy's squadrons far over his lines. In five days from June 1 forty-four separate machines were sent crashing down, and this morning, very early, flocks of aeroplanes went out to blind the enemy's eyes and report the progress of battle. In the darkness queer monsters moved up close to our lines, many of them crawling singly over the battlefields under cover of woods and ruins.

They were the Tanks, ready to go into action on a great day of war, when their pilots and crews have helped by high courage to victory.

Last night all was ready. Men knowing the risks of it all—for no plans are certain in war—had a sense of oppression, strained by poignant anxiety. Many men's lives were on the hazard of all this. The air was heavy, as though nature itself were full of tragedy. A summer fog was thick over Flanders, and the sky was livid. Forked lightning rent the low clouds, and thunder broke with menacing rumblings. Rain fell sharply, and on the conservatory of a big Flemish house where officers bent over their maps and plans the rain-drops beat noisily. But the storm passed and the night was calm and beautiful. Along the dark roads, and down the leafy lanes, columns of men were marching, and brass bands played them through the darkness. Guns and gun-limbers moved forward at a sharp pace. "Lights out" rang the challenges of the sentries to the staff cars passing beyond the last village where any gleam was allowed, and nearer to the lines masses of men lay sleeping or resting in the fields before getting orders to go forward into the battle zone. All through the night the sky was filled with vivid flashes of bursting shells and with steady hammer-strokes of guns, and from an observation-post looking across the shoulder of Kemmel Hill, straight to Wytschaete and the Messines Ridge, I watched this bombardment and waited for that moment when it should rise into a mad fury of gun-fire before our men lying in these dark fields should stumble forward. During those hours of waiting in the soft warm air of the night I thought of all I had heard of the position in front of us. "It's a Gibraltar," said an officer who was there in the early days of the war. "The enemy will fight his hardest for the Messines Ridge," said another officer, whose opinion has weight. "He has stacks of guns against us." Such thoughts made one shiver, though the night was warm, so warm and moist that wafts of scent came up from the earth and bushes. A full moon had risen, veiled by vapours until they drifted by and revealed all her pale light in a sky that was still faintly blue, with here and there a star. The moon through all her ages never looked down upon such fires of man-made hell as those which lashed out when the bombardment quickened. That was just before three o'clock. For two

hours before that fires had been lighted in the German lines by British shell-fire—big rose-coloured smoke-clouds with hearts of flame—and all round the salient and the Messines Ridge our guns flashed redly as they fired, and their shell-bursts scattered light against which the trees were etched sharply. I could hear the rattle of gun-wagons along the distant roads, and the tuff-tuff of an engine driving very close up to the firing-lines, and above the great loudness of our gun-fire the savage whine of German shrapnel coming over in quick volleys. The drone of a night-flying aeroplane passed overhead. The sky lightened a little, and showed black smudges like ink-blots on blue silk cloth where our kite-balloons rose in clusters to spy out the first news of the coming battle. The cocks of Flanders crowed, and two heavy German shells roared over Kemmel Hill and burst somewhere in our lines. A third came, but before its explosion could be heard, all the noise there had been, all these separate sounds of guns and high explosives and shrapnel were swept up into the tornado of artillery which now began.

The signal for its beginning was the most terribly beautiful thing, the most diabolical splendour, I have seen in war.

Out of the dark ridges of Messines and Wytschaete and that ill-famed Hill 60, for which many of our best have died, there gushed out and up enormous volumes of scarlet flame from the exploding mines and of earth and smoke, all lighted by the flame, spilling over into fountains of fierce colour, so that all the countryside was illumined by red light. Where some of us stood watching, aghast and spellbound by this burning horror, the ground trembled and surged violently to and fro. Truly the earth quaked. A New Zealand boy who came back wounded spoke to me about his own sensations. "I felt like being in an open boat on a rough sea. It rocked up and down this way and that."

Thousands of British soldiers were rocked like that before they scrambled up and went forward to the German lines—forward beneath that tornado of shells which crashed over the enemy's ground with a wild prolonged tumult just as day broke, with crimson feathers unfolding in the eastern sky, and flights of airmen following other flights above our heroes.

Rockets rose from the German lines—distress signals flung up by men who still lived in that fire zone—white and red and

green. They were calling to their gunners, warning them that the British were upon them. Their high lamps were burning as lost hopes in God or man, and then falling low and burning out. Presently there were no more of them, but others which were ours in places which had been German. Smoke drifted across and mingled with the morning mist. One could see nothing but a bank of fog thrust through with short stars of light. The first definite news that I had was from German prisoners, who came down in batches, carrying our wounded when any help was needed for our own stretcher-bearers. They described how our men came close behind the barrage, some of them, by a kind of miracle, in advance of the barrage. The Germans had not expected the attack for another two days, and last night were endeavouring to relieve some of their exhausted troops by new divisions, the 3rd Bavarians relieving the 24th Saxons, and the 104th Infantry Reserve the 23rd Bavarians. They lost heavily on the way up to the lines by our fire, and were then, after a few hours, attacked by our waves of infantry.

The story of this great battle and great victory—for it is really that—cannot be told in a few lines, and it is too soon yet to give exact details of the fighting. But from the reports that have now come in from all parts of the battle front it is good enough to know that everywhere our men have succeeded with astonishing rapidity, and that the plan of battle has been fulfilled almost to the letter and to the time-table. The New-Zealanders reached and captured Messines in an hour and forty minutes after the moment of attack, in spite of heavy fighting in German trenches, where many of the enemy were killed. Irish troops, Nationalists and Ulstermen, not divided in politics on the battlefield, but vying with each other in courage and self-sacrifice, stormed their way up to Wytschaete, and after desperate resistance from the enemy captured all that is left of the famous White Château, which for years our soldiers have watched through hidden glasses as a far high place like the castle of a dream. By midday our men were well down farther slopes of the ridge, while our field-batteries rushed up the ridge behind them to take up new positions. Farther north along the shoulder of the Ypres salient our English troops of the 19th, 41st, 47th, and 23rd Divisions advanced along a line including Battle Wood, south of Zillebeke, and now hold

all but a small part of it. Meanwhile the Germans are massing troops at Warneton and its neighbourhood, as though preparing a heavy counter-attack, and are shelling Messines Ridge with some violence. For to-day at least, in spite of fierce fighting that must follow, our men have achieved a victory, with light losses considering the severity of their task. The evil spell of the Ypres salient is broken. The salient itself is wiped out, and if we can hold the Messines Ridge, Ypres and its countryside will no longer exact that toll of death which for nearly three years has been a curse to us. The roads and fields are under a glare of sunshine as I write, and down them, through the dust and the fierce heat, come troops of German prisoners, exhausted and nerve-broken, but glad of life. And passing them come the walking wounded who attacked them in their tunnels at dawn to-day and conquered. The lightly wounded men are happy and proud of their victory.

"We New-Zealanders can afford to be a little cocky," said one of these bronzed fellows with eyes of cornflower blue. "My word, I'm glad we had the luck." He was wounded in the foot, but the man just hugged the news of victory. "We shall be no end stuck up," he said, and then he laughed in a simple way, and said, "I'm glad New Zealand did so well—that's natural. But they tell me the Irish were splendid, and the Australians could not be held back. It's good to have done the job, and I hope it will help on the end."

That New-Zealander spoke the thought of thousands who have been fighting in this battle. They have a right to be proud of themselves, for they have broken the curse of the salient and relieved it of some of its horror.

II

THE SPIRIT OF VICTORY

JUNE 8

I HAVE never seen the spirit of victory so real and so visible among great bodies of British troops since this war began. It shines in the eyes of our officers and men to-day up in the fighting zone and in the fields and woods below Wytschaete and Messines, where they are resting and sleeping after the

battle, regardless of the great noise of gun-fire which is still about them. Our men have a sense of great achievement, something big and definite and complete, in this capture of Messines Ridge. They knew how formidable it was to attack, and they count their cost—the price of victory—as extraordinarily light. Many brave men have fallen, and along the roads come many ambulances where prone figures lie with their soles up as a reminder that no battle may be fought without this traffic flowing back; but the proportion of highly wounded was high and the number of wounded amazingly low among most battalions. I met one company of Irish Fusiliers to-day who took their goal without a single casualty and marched into Wytschaete without firing a shot. That was a rare episode. But on all sides I hear astonishment that our losses were so small considering the immensity of their task. It is this which makes the men glad of victory—not having it clouded by such heavy sacrifices of life as in the battles of the Somme. "We got off light," said an Irish boy to-day; "we had the best of luck."

All along the way to Wytschaete, where I went through places which two days ago still lived up to the reputation of evil names—Suicide Corner, V.C. Walk, Shell Farm—and in woods like the Bois de Rossignol, where the death-birds came screaming until a moment before yesterday's dawn, officers and men, generals, brigadiers, sergeants, privates, spoke of victory with an enthusiasm that made their eyes alight. An officer reined in his horse and leaned over his saddle to speak to me. "It was a great day for Ireland," he said. Yesterday another man, with an arm in a sling, also used the words "a great day," but said, "It's a great day for New Zealand." And another officer, speaking of the way in which all our men went forward to victory, English troops advancing with their old unbroken courage in spite of hard fighting through a year of war, said: "This is the best thing our armies have ever done, the most complete and absolute success. It all went like clockwork."

One great proof of victory is the relief of some of those deadly places in the salient under direct observation from Messines Ridge—screens of foliage which I passed to-day are no longer needed, and one may walk openly in places where German eyes had been watching for men to kill for two years and a half.

And another proof, written in human figures, is one huge mass after another of German prisoners, a thousand or more in each assembling place in the fields along the roadsides. They were lying and standing to-day in the sunshine, with coloured handkerchiefs tied above their heads, many of them stripped to the waist to air their shirts, some still wearing their heavy shrapnel helmets with sackcloth covering, all drowsed with fatigue and the prolonged strain of our shell-fire, so that they sleep with heads on knees or lying as though dead in huddled postures. They wake at intervals, asking for water, and then sleep again. There are such crowds of these field-grey men that they are astounded by their own numbers, and when questioned speak gloomily of the doom that is upon their rule.

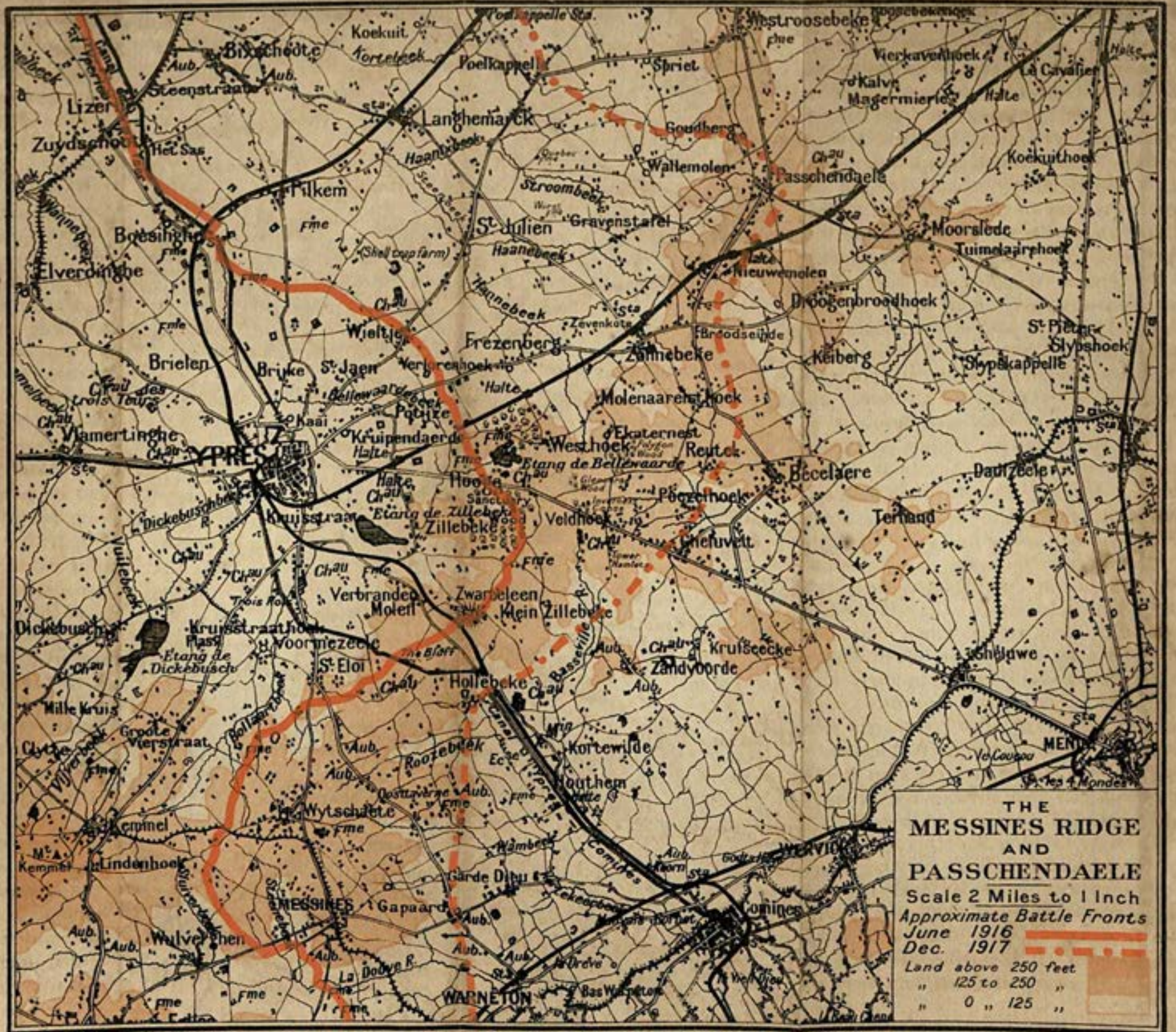
"What do you think of it all?" asked an Irish officer of a German officer whom he captured in Wytschaete village. The man shook his head and said in good English, "We are done for." Another officer taken by English troops on the northern sector of the attack was frank in revealing his tragic thoughts when he heard the mines go up. He thought, so he says, "Thank Heaven the British are attacking. Now I can surrender. Yesterday my division had three good regiments, now they do not exist. This attack ought to end the war." Let us not base too much optimistic belief on such words by German prisoners.

In that northern part of the attack by the London battalions of the 47th and the Yorkshires and other English troops of the 23rd Division, who started near Triangle Wood, there was bad ground for assembly before the battle known as the Mud-Patch. There were no trenches there, and our lads had to lie out all night in the open without any cover from the shell-fire. It seemed that the Germans saw them, and their commanding officer was in a fever of anxiety, thinking they were discovered and would be shelled to death. But, as though expecting a raid from one point, the enemy only barraged round a group of mine-craters, from which our men had been withdrawn, because their shafts were packed with explosives ready to be touched off at dawn. In one mine-crater held by the Germans a shaft ran underneath called the Berlin Shaft—the way to Berlin, according to the Australians who dug it months ago. Above it was a half-company of Germans, and when the mine was blown at dawn not a man escaped.

Beyond was the Damstrasse, where the enemy had deep trenches and strong emplacements in the hollow, so that our Generals were afraid of trouble here, but when our men came to it they found nothing but frightful ruin, obliterating all the trenches and redoubts, and the men who still lived there shouted: "Don't shoot, don't shoot, Kamerad!"

The taking of Wytschaete by the Irish Nationalists, with Ulster men next to them, was one of the great episodes of the battle, vying with the exploit of the men of New Zealand in carrying Messines Ridge. I went among them to-day up there by Wytschaete Wood across our old trenches and by "the great wall of China," built a few months ago as a barrier—a wonderful place of sand-bag defences and deep dug-outs. Not much is left of Wytschaete Wood, once 800 yards square, now a pitiful wreckage of broken stumps and tattered tree-trunks. The slopes of the ridge are all barren and tortured with shell-fire like the Vimy Ridge, and across it unceasingly went flights of heavy shells, droning loudly as they passed over the crest, and with all our heavy howitzers firing with thunderous ear-stunning strokes. But the Irish soldiers paid no heed to this noise of gun-fire, for the enemy was answering back hardly at all, and the battle-line had gone forward. An Irish major was asleep under a little bit of a copse within a few yards of a 6-in. howitzer, splitting the heavens with its sharp crack of sound, and he slept in his socks as sweetly as a babe in the cradle until wakened to speak to me, which made me sorry, because he had earned his rest. But he sat up smiling, and glad to talk of his Irish boys, who had done gloriously. Away off near a sinister little wood, where many men have died in the old days, sat the brigadier of the Irish troops, the South and West Country Irish who went through Wytschaete Wood and took the village. "Go and see my boys up in their trenches," he said; "they will tell you all they have done, and it was well done. Old Ireland has done great things."

The boys, as he called them, though some are old soldiers who fought at Suvla Bay, and the youngest of them are old in war and remember as far back in history as the days when they stormed through Guillemont and Ginchy, were sitting with German caps on their heads, and examining German machine-guns, and sorting all their souvenirs of battle. I talked with many of them, and they told their adventures of


THE
MESSINES RIDGE
AND
PASSCHENDAELE
Scale 2 Miles to 1 Inch
Approximate Battle Fronts
June 1916
Dec. 1917
Land above 250 feet
" 125 to 250 "
" 0 " 125 "
YPRES
MESSINES
WARNETON
Comines
Wervicq
MENIN
Zillebeke
Hollebeke
Wytschaete
Kemmel
Wulvergem
Lindenhoek
Voormezeele
Verbrandenmolen
Zwarteleen
Klein Zillebeke
Zandvoorde
Gapaard
Houthem
Kortewilde
Passchendaele
Broodseinde
Zonnebeke
Reutel
Becelaere
Terhand
Gheluwe
Moorslede
Ledeghem
Roulers
Langemarck
Poelkapelle
Westroosebeke
Zuydschoote
Lizerne
Pilkem
St. Julien
Gravenstafel
Frezenberg
Wieltje
Hooge
Zevenkote
Keiberg
Broodseinde
Poezelhoek
Veldhoek
Gheluvelt
Molenaarelsthoek
Westhoek
Ekaternest
Kruisstraat
Kruisstraathoek
Voormezeele
St. Eloi
Ploegsteert
Messines
Gapaard
Wulvergem
Houthem
Comines
Wervicq
Menin
Ypres
Zillebeke
Hollebeke
Wytschaete
Kemmel

yesterday with a touch of Irish humour and a sparkle in their eyes. It was the little things of battle which they remembered most; the rations and soda-water they found in German dug-outs; the way they groped around for souvenirs as soon as they gained their ground. But stupendous still in their imagination was the drum-fire of our guns and the explosion of the mines.

"As soon as the barrage began," said an Irish sergeant of the Munsters, "a mine only a few hundred yards away from us at Maedelstede Farm went up, and we went down. The ground rocked under us, and fire rushed up to the sky. The fumes came back on to us and made us dizzy, but we—the Royal Irish and the Munsters—went on to Petit-Bois Wood, and then to Wytschaete Wood, and other Irish lads passed through us to the attack on the village."

The only trouble was in and about the wood. In the centre of it was a small body of Germans, with a machine-gun, who held out stubbornly and swept the Irish with fire. But they were destroyed, and the attack swept on. There was another post hereabout, in which a party of Germans held out with rifle-fire. An Irish officer of a famous old family led an attack on this, and fell dead with a bullet in his brain at five yards range, but a sergeant with him, whom I met to-day, helped to surround the enemy, and this hornets' nest was routed out. A German officer had climbed a tree, and in the coolest possible way signalled with his hand to his men beyond. An Irishman brought him down, and made him a prisoner.

Wytschaete village was a fortress position, with machine-gun emplacements made for defence on all sides, but the Irish closed round it and captured it easily. The garrison was demoralized by prolonged shell-fire, which had made a clean sweep of the hospice ruins and the church and château, and every blade of grass above their tunnels. "I am an old soldier," said one of their officers, "and I hate to be a prisoner, but human nature cannot stand the strain of such bombardments."

On the right of Irish Nationalists fought the Ulstermen, keeping in absolute line with their comrades-in-arms, in friendly rivalry with them to give glory to Ireland. They advanced through Spanbeckmolen, a fortress position, through Hell Wood, to the top of Wytschaete Ridge, and it is curious that

these two bodies of Irish troops had an almost identical experience. The South and West Country Irishmen of Dublin and Munster took 1000 prisoners. So did the Ulstermen. When the Catholic Irishmen were shaken by the mine explosion a whole company of Germans was hurled high in its eruption, and this awful fate happened to another company of Germans in front of the Ulstermen. Without thought of old strife at home, these men fought side by side and are proud of each other. Their Irish blood has mingled, and out of it some spirit of healing and brotherhood should come because of this remembrance. An Irish soldier poet has made a new version of "The Wearing of the Green," inspired by the guns that wear green jackets of foliage and cover the advance of the Irish brigade. I heard some of the verses this morning:

They love the old division in the land the boys come from,
And they're proud of what they did at Loos and on the Somme.
If by chance we all advance to Whitesheet and Messines,
They'll know the guns that strafe the Huns were wearing of the green.

Wytschaete and Messines are safe in our hands, and our troops are far on the other side. A party of the enemy is holding out in Battle Wood, but that will not be for long, and is only a small episode. To-day and yesterday German troops massed at Warneton, as though for a counter-attack, but each time were scattered by our guns. From our new ridge, so long an evil barrier against us, we have observation on them, and the tables are turned.

III

AFTER THE EARTHQUAKE

JUNE 9

THE ground gained by our troops in the great battle of Messines remains firmly in our hands, and enemy attempts to counter-attack have been broken by our artillery, in most cases before the German troops have been able to advance. Last evening shortly before dusk of another day of brilliant sunshine, almost too hot for our men in shadeless country of the battlefields, S O S signals all along the line gave warning of German endeavours to thrust back our new front line far beyond the Messines

Ridge, and away north of St.-Eloi on the old line of the Ypres salient, now by our victory no longer a salient.

Our gunners got to work again, in spite of a night-and-day strain for more than a week, and for several hours there was another tremendous bombardment from all our heavies and field-guns, watched for miles around by Flemish peasants sitting outside their windmills and outside cottage doors, looking at this lightning in the sky, which is a revelation to them of the mighty growth of that British Army since those early days when a few divisions and a few guns came to these fields of Flanders and fought to a thin, ragged line round Ypres. In many cases the rockets which rose from our lines last night calling for the help of the gunners were hardly needed, for though the enemy was seen to be assembling, he did not try to break through our barrage. In many places massed bodies of his men were caught round Warneton by this new storm of fire which burst upon them, and the night scenes behind the German lines must have been full of terror and tragedy for those poor wretches urged forward along the roads ploughed up by our shells. Only at Klein Zillebeke, on the northern flank of our battle-line, did they gain a temporary footing, and many of them lie dead there after the fierce fighting which is still in progress.

It is no wonder that, after such experiences of our gun-fire, the German prisoners show no regret at being in British hands. I saw new batches of them to-day, mopped up last night as an aftermath of the battle, young boys and middle-aged men, all very sturdy and strong, and astonishingly clean after their escape from the tumult of that frightful ground by Wytschaete and Messines. They stretched themselves in the sunshine, and took their ease in green fields, drinking quarts of water provided by their guards. It is not with resignation but with joy that they find themselves on our side of the lines, away from all that horror of the fire zone.

"Now we shall go on leave," they said to one of our officers; "we are sick of this war." He spoke to two German boys who have been fighting for a year, and are now only seventeen and look much younger. "You ought to be spanked and sent home to your mothers," he said. They laughed, and said: "That is what we should like, sir, if you please."

All the prisoners are extraordinarily ignorant of the feeling

of hatred they have aroused against them in the world, and expect that they should be admired for the way they have fought. But they want the war to end quickly, and the rank and file do not seem to mind very much whether it ends by a German victory or German defeat, so that it ends somehow. One human being, shattered in nerves, half senseless, was dragged back after Hill 60 was mined, and he said that he had seen only two men of his company after the great explosion. All the others had been hurled sky-high by the flames and gases, or buried in the fall of earth.

The work of this mining under the German lines has been carried on for a year or more by a number of tunnelling companies from Australia, New Zealand, and our own mining districts. It was hard, dangerous toil, for the enemy was down counter-mining, and there were frightful moments when the men who heard the working of picks very close to them had to be rushed out lest they should be blown into the next world. Their own work was done quickly lest the enemy should discover the secret of these borings beneath their lines before the ammonal with which they were packed was detonated on the morning of the battle. It was in darkness that the miners relieved each other lest enemy aircraft or eyes that always stared down from the ridges should see and suspect. Some of our English troops took Hill 60 after this explosion, which flung some of them to the ground as they rose at the signal of attack. From the craters they dragged that dazed and terror-stricken officer, who had lost all his company after that vibration of an electric wire in contact with hellish forces.

Just south of these men, astride the Ypres—Comines Canal, a number of London battalions of the 47th Division were fighting forward to the ruins of the famous White Château, south of the canal, on the west of Hollebeke. It is the Château Matthieu, once a noble mansion, with a park in which a stream flowed from a lake to the canal, and fine stables south of the lake, surrounded by woods. For more than a year only ruins of the château stood, and the wood was like all these woods of war, lopped and torn by shell-fire, with black, dead limbs. Some of the London men were having a hard fight north of the canal in face of machine-gun fire sweeping them from two triangular spoil-banks, as they are called, where earth from the

canal sides has been stacked, forming strong points for the enemy above their tunnelled defences. They took one of these heaps of earth with eighty prisoners, but fell back from the other holding the canal bank opposite White Château, where their comrades, London men all, were fighting heavily. The Germans here did not yield without a desperate resistance. A company and a half of men held the ruins of the château, and flung out bombs to keep our assaulting troops at bay. A gallant platoon crept round the château walls, and hurled bombs over these bits of brickwork, and after some time of this fighting the enemy hoisted a white flag of surrender, and sixty prisoners, survivors of this garrison, were taken. The Londoners still had a hard way to go across the stream from the lake, twenty feet broad at points, and past the stables and through the old stumps of the wood, but they kept to the time-table of the battle and added 450 prisoners to the great captures of the day. It was an historic day in the record of the London men of the 47th Division, who have fought with such glorious valour since they first came out to France.

JUNE 10

ON the right of the London troops were some English county regiments of the 41st Division—the 60th Rifles (King's Royal Rifles), West Kents, and others—men who fought a great battle in the Somme fields that day when a Tank waddled up the high street of Flers with cheering men behind.

On the night of June 6 they lay by St.-Eloi, in the salient opposite the Mound, a famous heap of earth taken over by the glorious old 3rd Division, and lost when the Canadians were violently attacked a year ago. This mound had been cratered by deep mines in those bad old days of fighting, but the enemy did not know that new shafts had been tunnelled under them, and that explosive forces enormously greater than in the first mines were about to be touched off. When the metal discs were fired by tunnelling officers the sound of thousands of our men cheering with the wild madness of enthusiasm could be heard even above the deafening uproar of the explosions. Then waves of riflemen ran forward, round the vast craters that had been flung open and across the first line of German trenches, frightfully upheaved and shattered. There were not many

living Germans here, and they were dazed by the shock and terror of the mines and made no kind of fight. Beyond them was a strong place known as the Damstrasse, a street of concrete houses built of great blocks six feet thick, and so enormously solid that not even heavy shell-bursts could do much damage to them. This position had given great anxiety to our officers, who knew its strength, but as it happened, the violence of our shell-fire was so amazing that many of these blockhouses were blown in, and the garrison of Damstrasse was utterly cowed, so that they were captured by hundreds.

The King's Royal Rifles pressed forward into the frightful chaos of country, with charred tree-trunks, upturned trenches, rubbish-heaps which had been German strong points, and a litter of machine-guns, twisted wire, bomb stores, and dead bodies. The first check came outside the ruin of an estaminet, in which a party of Germans, with machine-guns and rifles, determined to sell their lives dearly. They poured fire into our men, who suffered a good many casualties here, but would not be baulked, whatever the cost. They took what cover they could, and used their rifles to riddle the place with shot. One by one the Germans fell, and their fire slackened. Then the Rifles charged the ruins and captured all those who still remained alive. Fresh waves of men came up and went forward into Ravine Wood, with its tattered trunks and litter of broken branches. Here there was another fight, very fierce and bloody, between some of the West Kents and German soldiers of the 35th Division who attempted a strong counter-attack. The men of Kent had their bayonets fixed, and at a word from their officers they made a quick, grim dash at the Germans, advancing upon them through the dead wood with their bayonets ready also, so that the morning sun gleamed upon all this steel. The bayonets crossed. The men of Kent went through the enemy thrusting and stabbing, but though they saw red in that hour they gave quarter to men who dropped their rifles and cried "Kamerad!" Twenty-five prisoners were taken in that encounter, and over 800 prisoners were taken between the Mound and Ravine Wood before the day was done, with a great store of booty, including eight trench-mortars and nearly thirty machine-guns, though many more lie buried in this ground, and two searchlights and sacks of letters from German soldiers to their homes. The enemy's

losses hereabouts were very heavy. An officer taken prisoner said his own company had been reduced to thirty men before the battle began owing to our bombardment. Many of their batteries were knocked out, and the gunners lie dead before them. Several Tanks came up to share in the fight, and climbed over all this broken ground, but did not find much work to do as the strong parts had been knocked out.

The completeness of this victory, the march through of our troops, the utter despair of the German troops, was due in an overwhelming way to the guns, and the gunners who served them. It is only right and just that the highest tribute should be paid to these men, who have worked day and night for nearly a fortnight, under the intense strain, in an infernal noise, without sleep enough to relieve the nerve-rack, and always in danger of death. Gunner officers are hoarse with shouting under fire. They are hollow-eyed with bodily and mental exhaustion. The ammunition-carriers worked themselves stiff in order to feed the guns. They have used up incredible numbers of shells. The gunners of one division alone fired 180,000 shells with their field-batteries, and over 46,000 with their heavies. On the same scale has been the ammunition expenditure of all other groups of guns.

An historic scene took place after our troops had gained the high ground of Wytschaete and Messines. An order passed along to all the batteries. Gun horses were standing by. They were harnessed to the guns. The limbers of the field-batteries lined up. Then half-way through the battle the old gun positions were abandoned, after two and a half years of stationary warfare in the salient, searched every day of that time by German shells fired by direct observation from that ground just taken. The drivers urged on their horses. They drove at a gallop past old screens, and out of camouflaged places where men had walked stealthily, and dashed up the slopes. The infantry stood by to let them pass, and from thousands of men, these dusty, hot, parched soldiers of ours, who were waiting to go forward in support of the first waves of assaulting troops, there rose a great following cheer, which swept along the track of the gunners, and went with them up the ridge, where they unlimbered and got into action again for the second phase of the fighting down the farther slopes.

As scouts of the gunners, as their watchers and signallers, were the boys of the Royal Flying Corps. I said yesterday that they were uplifted with a kind of intoxication of enthusiasm. A youthful madness took possession of them. Those squadrons which I saw flying overhead while it was still dark on Thursday morning did daredevil, reckless, almost incredible things. They flew as men inspired by passion and a fierce joy of battle. They were hunters seeking their prey. They were Berserkers of the air, determined to kill though they should be killed, to scatter death among the enemy, to destroy him in the air and on the earth, to smite him in his body and in his works and in his soul by a terror of him. This may seem language of exaggeration, the silly fantasy of a writing-man careless of the exact truth. It is less than the truth, and the sober facts are wild things. Early on June 7 they were up and away, as I described them, passing overhead on that fateful morning before the crimson feather clouds appeared over the battlefield. They flew above German railway stations far behind the lines, and dropped tons of explosives, blowing up rolling stock, smashing rails and bridges. They attacked German aerodromes, flying low to the level of the sheds and spattering them with machine-gun bullets so that no German airmen came out of them that day. One man's flight, told in his own dry words, is like the wild nightmare of an airman's dream. He flew to a German aerodrome and circled round. A German machine-gun spat out bullets at him. The airman saw it, swooped over it, and fired at the gunner. He saw his bullets hit the gun. The man ceased fire, screamed, and ran for cover. Then our airman flew off, chased trains and fired into their windows. He flew over small bodies of troops on the march, swooped, fired, and scattered them. Afterwards he met a convoy going to Comines, and he circled over their heads, hardly higher than their heads, and fired into them. Near Warneton he came upon troops massing for a counter-attack, and made a new attack, inflicting casualties and making them run in all directions.

One of our flying men attacked and silenced four machine-gun teams in a strong emplacement. Others cleared trenches of German soldiers, who scuttled like rabbits into their dug-outs. They fired everything they carried at anything which

would kill the enemy or destroy his material. Having used up all his Lewis-gun ammunition upon marching troops, one lad fired his Very-lights, his signal-rockets, at the next group of men he saw. They flew at field-gunners and put them to flight, at heavy guns crawling along the roads on caterpillar wheels, at transport wagons, motor-lorries, and one motor-car, whose passengers, if they live, will never forget that sudden rush of wings four feet overhead, with a spasm of bullets about them. The aeroplane was so low that the pilot thought he would crash into the motor-car, but he just planed clear of it as the driver steered it sharply into a ditch, where it overturned with its five occupants. The airman went on his journey, scattered 500 infantry and returned home after a long flight never higher than 500 feet above the ground.

Meanwhile during the progress of the battle our air squadrons appointed for artillery observation work were all over the enemy's batteries, signalling to our gunners and sending back "O.K." flashes when our counter-battery work was effective. There were an amazing number of "O.K.'s." One air squadron alone helped a group of heavies to silence seventy-two batteries. Everywhere over the battle-ground our air scouts were out and about, watching the progress of infantry, speaking to them by signals, picking up their answers, flying back to headquarters with certain information; so that the direction of the battle was helped enormously by this quick intelligence. It was a day of triumph for the Royal Flying Corps, and for all those boys with wings on their breasts, who, after their day's flight, come down to the French estaminets to rattle ragtime on untuned pianos, and give glad eyes to any pretty girl about, and fling themselves into the joy of life which they risk so lightly.

In this battle of Messines there was not any body of our men who did not spend all their strength and take all risks with a kind of passionate exultation of spirit. The Manchester men dug a six-foot deep trench-line to our new front on the ridge, beating all records. Flinging off tunics and shirts so that they were naked to the waist, New-Zealanders who took Messines dug as inspired diggers, fast and furiously, and before next day had dawned had two long, deep trenches as secure defences against German counter-attacks.

The stretcher-bearers, the water-carriers, the transport men with their pack-mules went up through shell-fire as I saw them yesterday, and never tired. The stretcher-bearers were heroic fellows, as in every battle from which I have seen them coming back with their burdens across the cratered ground of dreadful fields such as that of Wytschaete and Messines, still shelled heavily by the enemy, whose fury at losing that long-held ground is proved by his bombardment of their ruins—the red brick-heap of Wytschaete Château, the black tree-stumps which is all that is left of Messines.

Our casualties remain light, as figures of losses go in this war and in proportion to the greatness of this battle. My own estimates, based upon what I can hear of the losses of different bodies of troops engaged, work out at something like 10,000 for the day of battle. It is less than a fifth of what I should have reckoned to be the cost of this capture of Messines Ridge, and gives the lie to German claims. It is one of the greatest and cheapest achievements of British arms throughout this war, though the loss of so many gallant men is sad enough, God knows, and for the enemy it is as hard a blow as our taking of the Vimy Ridge two months ago, when he was staggered by his loss.

IV

THE EFFECT OF THE BLOW

JUNE 11

THE effect of our capture of Messines and Wytschaete has been such a stunning blow on the enemy that he has not as yet made any attempt at counter-attacking on a big scale. The rapid advance of our men below the farther slopes of the ridge and the rush forward of our guns made it impossible for him to rally his supporting troops quickly, and as the hours pass it becomes more impossible for him to storm his way back. His early attempts to assemble troops in the Warneton neighbourhood were annihilated instantly by enormous shell-fire directed by the new observation we had gained at Messines, and during the past twenty-four hours, up to the time I write, he shows no further sign of asking for trouble, but is obviously engaged in reorganizing his forces, demoralized by defeat, and getting his guns into safer positions. Many of his guns lie

battered and buried about the battlefield, and some of his batteries, put out of action by our bombardment, remain between our new lines and his, but so covered by our fire that he has a poor chance of getting them away. His losses in guns, trench-mortars and machine-guns must be alarming to him, for I have no doubt at all, after seeing the frightful effect of our bombardment, that these were destroyed on a great scale, so that the number of our trophies will not at all represent his actual loss in weapons and material of war.

That is the human mechanical side of things. More horrible to the unfortunate soldiers of the German army is the devilish punishment inflicted upon them during the past ten days, culminating on that day of battle when every weapon for the slaughter of men, from the heaviest of high explosives to boiling oil and gas-shells, was let loose upon them in one wild tempest of destruction, which blew them out of the earth and off the earth, and frizzled them and blinded them, and choked them and mutilated them, and made them mad.

One German boy, who looked not more than fifteen years of age —a child—was found yesterday lying in a shell-hole by the side of a dead man who had been shot through the temple, and he was a gibbering idiot through fear. Not the only one. German officers say that many of their men went raving mad under the strain of our bombardment, and tried to kill their comrades or themselves, or fell into an ague of terror, clawing their mouths, with all the symptoms of the worst shell-shock.

Many of our prisoners believe they were betrayed, and were sacrificed coldly and deliberately by their higher command. Before the battle an order of the day was issued to them, telling them to hold out if surrounded and fight their way back with the bayonet, because behind them would be fresh divisions ready to support immediate counter-attacks. Those fresh divisions never appeared. We know that they had no chance of getting near our lines because of our far-reaching fire, and the work of our aircraft—and the men of Messines and Wytschaete and all the ground south of St.-Eloi were cut off and captured, if they did not die. After our first assaults, the enemy, panic-stricken, were more concerned in getting away their guns than in protecting their troops, and they were left to our mercy.

Walking about those monstrous mine-craters which we tore

out of the earth at dawn on June 7, and across the old German lines beyond St.-Eloi on the left of our attack, southwards by Wytschaete and the lower slopes of Messines, to-day, as after the morning of battle, I pitied any human souls who had to suffer what these German soldiers must have suffered in the agony of fear before death came to many of them. All this wide area of country is blasted and harrowed and holed with monstrous pits. There was at least one great shell to every nine yards, and at 200 yards its flying steel has a killing power. No idea of it all can be conveyed by many words describing this upheaval of sand-bags and barricades and trenches and redoubts, and this sieve of earth, pitted by countless shell-craters. All the woods where the Germans lived—Oaten Wood and Damstrasse Wood and Ravine Wood, down to Wytschaete Wood and Hell Wood—are but gaunt stumps sticking out of ash-grey heaps of earth. German dead lie here and there in batches or in rows as they were shot down by enfilade fire, but I have seen very few bodies, for the most of them were buried in the upheaved earth, as one can tell by the foul vapours which creep out from the smashed trenches, where the deep dug-outs have collapsed and tunnels have fallen in, so that all this battleground is a graveyard of men, buried as they died or before they died.

Three men escaped by some wild freak of chance from a mine-crater under the Mound by St.-Eloi. I stood on the lip of it to-day, high above its shelving sides, and find it hard to believe that any living thing could have escaped from its upheaval. But the Germans had many dug-outs in the old craters which existed here before this last one was blown, and after that ferocious fighting a year ago, when we lost this ground. One of those dug-outs remained firm when our mine was touched off four days ago, and out of its mouth crept, two days later, three haggard men, still shaking and dazed, who had been deep in the ground when all about them was hurled sky-high, with a rush of gas and flame and a monstrous uproar. They were unscathed, except in their souls, where terror lived.

By my side to-day, as I looked down into this pit of hell, stood a man who had worked for a year in the making of it—an Australian officer of engineers. He stood smoking his pipe on the edge of the shell-crater, and said in a cheerful way, "It is good to be in the fresh air again."

The fresh air did not seem to me very good there this morning. It was filled with abominable noise, which is a menace of death—the savage whine of German shrapnel flung about between the Bluff and St.-Eloi in a haphazard way, and heavy crumps searching for our batteries in their new positions, and our shells whistling over in long flights. Hideous sounds in a ghastly scene which filled me with nausea, so that I wanted not to linger there.

But I understood this Australian's craving for open-air life, even such open air as this, when he told me that he had been working underground for nearly two years in the dark saps pierced under the German lines, and running very close to German saps nosing their way, and sometimes breaking through, to ours, so that the men clawed at each other's throats in these tunnels and beat each other to death with picks and shovels, or were blown to bits by mine explosions. It was always a race for time to blow up the charges, and sometimes the enemy was first, and sometimes we were, and once the enemy in a great attack against the Canadians got in and blew up our shafts and sapheads and cut off our tunnellers. That Australian officer was one of those. For forty-eight hours he was buried alive, and had to dig his way out. So now after his job was done he likes the open-air life.

"No more underground work for me after this war," he said. "I've had enough of it."

The German ground hereabouts was taken by those troops of ours whose fighting across the Damstrasse and in Ravine Wood I described yesterday. Through them went another body of troops—the troops of the 24th Division—whose fortunes I have described in other battles, including some Leinster lads who have a padre for their hero, and English county troops who knew the look of Vimy Ridge before the Canadians reached the crest of it. They had to make the final assault to the farthest line of attack, passing through masses of men who had taken the first lines. All this was rehearsed in fields behind the battle-ground so thoroughly that the men could have gone forward blindfold. It all went like clockwork, and though the enemy fought hard on that last line beyond the Damstrasse by Rose Wood and Bug Wood, one post holding out with machine-guns, our men captured it with few casualties. They took 800 prisoners that day, with six field-guns,

and their spirit is high after victory. Next morning the Irish padre was seen sitting outside a shell-hole with a clean white collar and white socks with his boots off. "Well done, boys!" he said, and they were glad to see him there.

All our men were wonderfully inspired by a belief in the guns, so that they walked close behind a frightful barrage. Each body of troops vied with other regiments in a friendly rivalry. There was a race between the South and North Irish as to whether a green flag or an orange should be planted first above the ruins of Wytschaete. I don't know which won, but both flags flew there when the crest had been gained.

V

LOOKING BACKWARD

JUNE 12

"THE enemy must not get the Messines Ridge at any price."

This sentence stands out as an absolute command in the German order issued to their troops before the battle which they knew was coming. The words are peremptory, among promises of artillery support and immediate counter-attacks from divisions behind the first-line troops, which would be read now as a hollow mockery by those men who are our prisoners, captured in crowds from their welter of mined and cratered earth. While half-way through the battle their artillery tried to drag their field-guns back to something like safety in the wake of heavy guns, which even before the battle had been withdrawn to the farthest possible range of action, though forward observing officers tried to conceal this from the infantry by coming to their usual posts. The battle is over. Messines Ridge, which was not to be ours at any price, is ours at a price which our Army thinks very cheap—though many brave men paid for it with their lives—and our outposts are pushing forward towards Warneton, far beyond the farther slopes, after an enemy retiring upon that place. Only our men who have fought in the Ypres salient know the full meaning of that order. "The enemy must not get the Messines Ridge at any price."

The Messines Ridge was our curse, and the loss of it to the enemy means a great relief to that curse by straightening out

the salient south of Hooge, and robbing the enemy of direct observation over our ground and forcing his guns farther back.

From Messines and Wytschaete he had absolute observation of a wide tract of country in which our men lived and died—how complete an observation I did not realize until after this battle, when standing in Wytschaete Wood and on the Mound by St.-Eloi, and on the ground rising up to Messines, I looked back, and saw every detail of our old territory laid out like a relief map brightly coloured. "My God," said an officer by my side, "it's a wonder they allowed us to live at all." He had fought in the old days in the salient, had lived like a hunted animal there, hiding in holes from the monstrous birds of prey screeching and roaring overhead in search of human flesh. Before us now, looking as the Germans used to look, we saw all this countryside, which is a field of honour, where our youth has fallen in great numbers, a great graveyard of gallant boyhood. The enemy could see every movement of our men, unless they moved underground, or under the cover of foliage on Kemmel Hill and its leafy lanes, or behind the camouflage screens which run along the roadways, or between the gaps in the ruined villages. Startlingly clear were the red roofs of Dickebusch and the gaunt ribs of its broken houses, into which for two years and a half the enemy has flung big shells, and the church tower of Kemmel, where the graves are opened by shell-fire and old bones laid bare. The roads to Voormezeele and Vierstraat, through which I went yesterday, are still under the old spell of horror, and all those obscene ruins of decent Flemish hamlets. Southward one saw Neuve-Eglise, with its rag of a tower, and Plug Street Wood, where bullets snapped between the branches about Piccadilly Circus and down the Strand and across to Somerset House, and where at Hyde Park Corner I first heard the voice of "Percy," a high-velocity fellow, who kills you with a quick pounce. German eyes staring from Wytschaete and Messines, making little marks on big maps, talking to their gunners over telephone wires, and registering roads and cross-roads, field-tracks, camps, billets, farmhouses tucked into little groups of trees through which their red roofs gleamed, watching through telescopes for small parties of British soldiers or single figures in a flowered tapestry of fields between the winding hummocks

of sand-bag parapets, had all this ground of ours at the mercy of their guns, and that was not merciful.

Day by day two years ago I used to see Dickebusch in clouds of smoke, and hated to go through the place. They shelled separate farmhouses and isolated barns until they became bits of oddly standing brick about great holes. They shelled the roads down which our transports came at night, and communication-trenches up which our men moved to the front lines, and gun-positions revealed by every flash, and dug-outs foolishly frail against their frightful 5·9's, which in early days we could only answer with a few pip-squeaks. Yet by some extraordinary freak, not certainly by any kind of charity, for that does not belong to war, there were places they failed to shell, though they were clearly visible—little groups of Flemish cottages with flaming red tiles, a big old house here or there with pointed roofs rising above a screen of poplar-trees, fields still cultivated, as I saw them yesterday, by old Flemish women who bent over the beetroots and hung out washing under German eyes and German guns, and went up and down with plough-horses close to our gun-positions, and sold bad beer to English soldiers glad of any kind of beer in places where death was imminent and where, as they drank, the glass might be smashed out of their hand by a flying scythe or a yard of wall.

"Why do you stay here?" I asked an old woman in Plug Street village a year and a half ago. Four children played about her, though at the time shells were whining overhead and crashing but half a field away. "It is my home," she said, and thought that a good enough answer.

"How about the children?" I asked, and she said, "It's their home, and we earn a little money."

Even when this last battle began those peasants still remained encircled by our batteries and with German crumps falling about their fields; blear-eyed old men gazed up to the sky, watched the flame-bursts of the mines, then turned to their earth again; and the battle itself was heralded at dawn by the crowing of cocks in little farmsteads somewhere down by Kemmel. Chanticleer sounded the battle-charge with his clarion note, as in old dawns when English and French knights were drawn in line of battle.

An officer who was with me in Wytschaete Wood, looked

down at these old places where he had lived in the menace of death, and remembered his escapes; that time when the back of his dug-out was hit by a huge shell as he sat in his pyjamas, smoking a cigarette; and that other time when his servant was buried alive quite close to him, and the nights and days under constant shell-fire. But these little homesteads in or about the salient are few in their strange escape, and elsewhere there is not a building which stands unpierced or in more than a fragment of ruin. Young officers of ours lived within these ruins wondering whether it would be this day or next, now, as they spoke, or in the silence that followed, that some beastly shell would burst through and tear down the Kirchner prints which they had pinned to broken timbers, and smash the bits of mirror they used for shaving-glasses and lay them out in the wreckage. When he goes home on leave and sits at his own hearthside these dream-pictures come back to him with their old horror, as to thousands of men who have fought in the salient, like those London boys I met one night in Ypres cooking cocoa under shell-fire, like those King's Royal Riflemen I saw going up to a counter-attack after the first attack by "flammenwerfer," and the padre who went up to the canal bank at night and found five dead men in a Red Cross hut and not a soul alive about him, and the Canadians who fought through a storm of shells in Maple Copse.

The horror of that salient in its old evil days lives in its sinister place-names: Dead Horse Corner and Dead Cow Farm, and the farm beyond Plug Street, Dead Dog Farm, and the Moated Grange on the way to St.-Eloi, Stinking Farm, and Suicide Corner, and Shell-Trap Barn. I passed by some of these places and felt cold in remembrance of all the evil of them. Boys of ours have been smashed in all these ill-famed spots. Every bit of ruin here is the scene of foul tragedy to young life. To these places women will come to weep when the war is done, and the stones will be memorials of brave hearts who came here in the darkness with just a glance at the lights in the sky and a word of "Carry on, men," before they fell.

VI

THE AUSTRALIANS AT MESSINES

JUNE 17

THE sun is fierce and hot over Flanders, giving great splendour to this June of war, but baking our troops brown and dry. Up in the battle-line thirst is a cruel demon in that shadowless land of craters, where the earth itself is parched and cracked, and where there is a white, blinding glare.

On the day of the Messines battle water went up quickly, with two lemons for each man, "to help them through the barrage," according to a young staff officer with a bright sense of humour at the mess-table. But there was never too much, and in some places not enough for the wounded men, whose thirst was like a fire, and yet not greedy, poor chaps, if there was only a little to go round.

"Can you spare a drop," said a group of them—all Australian lads—to a friend of mine who was going up one day with a kerosene-tin full of water to the front line. "The fellows up in front want it badly," said my friend, "and I promised to get it there, but if you'll just take a sip——"

Those Australians were all in a muck of wounds and sweat. But they just moistened their lips and passed the water on. One man shook his head and said, "Take it to the fellows in front." It was the old Philip Sidney touch by way of Australia, and it is not rare among all our fighting men—lawless chaps when they are on a loose end, but great-hearted children at times like this.

All this pageant of war in France and Flanders is on fire with sun, and it is wonderful to pass through the panorama of the war zone, as I do most days, and get a picture of it into one's eyes and soul—columns of men marching with wet, bronzed faces through clouds of white dust, or through fields where there is a patchwork tapestry of colour woven of great stretches of clover drenching the air with its scent, and of poppies which spill a scarlet flood down the slopes, and of green wheat and gold-brown earth. Gunners ride in their shirts with sleeves rolled up. About old barns men work in their billets stripped to the belt. Up in the "strafed" country of the old

salient men sit about ruins between spells of work on roads and rails on the shady side of shell-broken walls, dreaming of bottled beer and rivers of cider, and the New-Zealanders are as brown as gipsies under their high felt hats.

Talk to any group of men, or go into any officers' mess, and one hears about new aspects and angles of the recent fighting by our Second Army; episodes which throw new light on the enemy's losses and our men's valour, and sufferings—because it wasn't a "walk-over" all the way round—and incidents, which ought to be historic, but just come out in a casual way of gossip by men who happened to be there.

I only heard yesterday about twenty German officers who were dragged out of one dug-out near Wytschaete. They were all huddled down there in a black despair, knowing their game was up as far as the Messines Ridge was concerned. Their men had all gone to the devil, according to their view of the situation, abandoned by the guns, which might have protected them. The Second Division of East Prussians had been wiped out. Of a strength of 3600 we captured over 2000, whilst most of the remainder must be killed or wounded. In the counter-attack the Germans brought up a new division and flung them in, and the queer thing is that our men were not aware of this, but just marched through them to their final goal, believing they belonged to the original crowd on Messines Ridge, and not the counter-attacking troops who had just arrived.

The Australians had some great adventures in this battle, and not enough has been told about them, because they took a good share of the fighting, especially in the last phase of it, when they passed through some of our first-wave troops and held a broad stretch of new front under violent fire and against the enemy's endeavours to retake the ground. On the extreme right of our line, forming the pivot of the attack, was a body of Australian troops who had to get through the German barrage and fling duck-board bridges over the little Douve river, and cross to the German support line under machine-gun fire from a beastly little ruin called Grey Farm. The enemy was sniping from shell-holes, and bullets were flying about rather badly. A young Australian officer dealt with Grey Farm, crawling through a hedge with a small party of men, and setting fire to the ruin, so that it should give no more cover. Meanwhile, farther to the north, the Germans were still

about in gaps not yet linked up, and in strong points not yet cleared. A body of them gave trouble in Huns' Walk on the Messines road, where there was a belt of uncut wire when the Australians arrived. "Hell!" said the Australians. "What are we going to do about that?" There was heavy shell-fire and machine-gun fire, and the sight of that wire was disgusting.

"Leave it to me," said a young Tank officer. "I guess old Rattle-belly can roll that down." He and other Tank officers were keen, even at the most deadly risks, to do good work with their queer beasts alongside the Australians for reasons that belong to another story.

They did good work, and this Tank at Huns' Walk crawled along the hedge of wire and laid it flat, as its tracks there still show. Another Tank was slouching about under heavy shelling in search of strong posts, with the Australian boys close up to its flanks with their bayonets fixed. Suddenly, a burst of flame came from it, and it seemed a doomed thing. But out of the body of the beast came a very cool young man, who mounted high with bits of shell whistling by his head. He stamped out the fire, and did not hear the comments of the Australian lads, who said, "Gosh, that fellow is pretty game. He's all right."

Much farther north another Tank came into action, with the Australians near. A few old remnants of charred wall and timber, where there was a strong post of Germans in concrete chambers, were causing our troops loss and worry. "Anything I can do to help you?" asked a Tank officer very politely through the steel trap-door. "Your machine-guns would be jolly useful in our trench," said an Australian officer. "We are a bit under strength here."

The Tank officer was a friend in distress. He dismantled his machine-guns, took them into the trench and fought alongside the Australians until they were relieved.

Just west of Van Hove Farm, in a gap between the Australians and the English, the Germans got into a place called Polka Estaminet—don't imagine it as a neat little inn with a penny-in-the-slot piano in the front parlour—and they had to be driven out by sharp rifle-fire. Next morning one of our men walked into a pocket of a hundred Germans, and a young Australian officer was told off with twenty men to bomb them

out. There was a battle of bombs, which was very hot while it lasted, and then the Germans bolted off under machine-gun and rifle fire. Australian patrols went out and brought in forty wounded Germans and counted sixty to eighty dead.

VII

A BATTLE IN A THUNDER-STORM

JUNE 29

IN a violent thunder-storm whose noise and lightning mingled in an awesome way with the tumult and flame of the great artillery a minor battle broke out last evening round Lens and southwards beyond Oppy. The Canadians fought their way into Avion, a southern suburb of Lens, to a line giving them the larger half of the village, and driving the enemy back across the swamps to the outer defences of Lens city. Outside Oppy and south of it troops of old English county regiments seized the front-line system of German trenches and captured about 200 prisoners and several guns. West of Lens some Midland troops stormed and gained a line of trenches which belong to the main defences of the city, and north of it there was a big raid which caused great loss of life to the enemy. It was a heavy series of blows falling suddenly upon him, and giving him no time for a leisurely retirement to his inner line of defence in Lens.

I saw the beginning of the battle, and watched the frightful gun-fire until darkness and dense banks of smoke blotted out this vision of the mining cities in which men were fighting through bursting shells. That beginning was a terrifying sight, and a sense of the enormous tragedy of the world in conflict overwhelmed one's soul, because of the strange atmospheric effects, and that most weird mingling of storm and artillery, as though the gods were angry and stirred to reveal the eternal forces of their own thunderbolts above this human strife. Just in front of where I crouched in a shell-crater was Swallows' Wood, or the Bois d'Hirondelle, and beyond that La Coulotte, which the Canadians had just taken, and a little way farther the long straggle of streets which is Avion, leading up to Lens, with its square-towered church and high water-towers and factory chimneys. Straight and long, bordered by broken

trees, went the Arras—Lens road, on which any man may walk to a certain rendezvous with death if he goes far enough, and I saw how it crossed the Souchez river by the broken bridge of Leauvette, from which the Canadians were going to make their new attack. A gleam of sunlight rested there for a while, and the little river was a blue streak this side of Avion. But the sky began to darken strangely. The air was still and hushed. A blue dusk crept across the landscape. The trees of Hirondelle Wood and the towers of Lens blackened. Far behind Vimy, old ruins—of Souchez and Ablain-St.-Nazaire—were white and ghostly.

One of my companions in a shell-hole looked up and said: "Is the 'good old German God' at work again?" Other powers were at work. Huge shells from our heavy howitzers, now away behind us, passed overhead with a noise such as long-tailed comets must have. I watched them burst, raising volumes of ruddy smoke in Avion and Lens. To the right of Lens by Sallaumines there was some other kind of explosion, rolling up and up in big, curly clouds. In the still air there was the drone of many engines. The darkening sky was full of black specks, which were British aeroplanes flying out on reconnaissance over Lens and Avion. "O brave birds!" said a friend by my side, waving up to them. German shrapnel puffed about their wings, bursting with little glints of flames, but they flew on.

It was then just seven o'clock. Our guns had almost ceased fire. There were strange sinister silences over all the battle-field, broken only by single gun-shots or the high snarl of German shrapnel or the single thud of a German crump. It was almost dark. The blue went out of the little Souchez river. Lens and Avion were in gulfs of blackness. A long rolling thunderclap shook all the sky, and flashes of lightning zigzagged over the Vimy Ridge, whitening the edges of its upheaved earth. The sky opened, and a storm of rain swept down fiercely.

"Yes, the 'good old German God' is busy again," said my fellow-tenant of the shell-crater and of the pond that welled up in it. "Just our beastly luck!" It was ten minutes past seven, and we had heard that the battle was to begin at seven. Perhaps it had been postponed.

As the thought was uttered the battle began. It began with

one great roar of guns. Not only behind us but far to our right and left. Flights of shells passed over our heads as though long-tailed comets of the spheres had broken loose from the divine order of things. In a wide sweep round Lens they burst with sharp flashes and lighted fires there. Outside the Cité du Moulin, at the western edge of Lens, a long chain of golden fountains rose as though little mines had been blown, and they were followed by a high bank of white impenetrable smoke. On the right of Avion another smoke-barrage was discharged, and above it there rose one of the strangest things I have seen in war. It was the figure of a woman, colossal, so that her head seemed to reach the heavens. It was not a fanciful idea, as when men watch the shapes of clouds and say, "How like Gladstone!" or "There is a camel!" or "A ship!" This woman figure of white solid smoke was as though carved out of rock, and she seemed to stare across the battlefield, and stayed there unchanged for several minutes. The guns continued their fury. Rockets went up out of Avion, and the German guns answered these signals. There was one wild tumult of artillery beating down the lines southward to Oppy, and beyond and above and through and into all this violence of sound there was the roll and rattle of thunder—heavy claps —and the rattle of the storm-drums. Lightning flashed above the flashes of our batteries, gave a livid outline to black trees and chimneys, and pierced the heart of all this darkness with long light swords. It was bad luck for our men, as I have heard since from messages which came back out of those smoke-banks through which no mortal eye could see. The men were drenched to the skin as soon as they started to attack. The rain beat into their faces and upon their steel hats. In a few minutes all the shelled ground across which they had to fight became as slippery as ice, so that many of them stumbled and fell. In Avion the enemy had already let loose floods to stop the way to Lens, and by the rain-storm they spread into big swamps. But the Canadians went ahead straight into the streets of Avion, leaving little searching-parties on their trail to make sure of the ruined houses, where machine-guns might be hidden.

This street fighting is always a nasty business, but in the south and western streets there was not much trouble from German infantry. Round Leauvette many of them lay dead.

The living rear-guards surrendered in small parties from cellars and tunnels. The chief trouble of the Canadians was on the right, by Fosse 4 and a huddle of pit-heads where the enemy was in strength with many machine-guns, where he fired with a steady sweep of bullets, which I heard last night above all the other noise. The Canadians swung to the left a little to avoid that stronghold, and established themselves on a diagonal line, striking north-west and south-east through the slums, where they took what cover they could from the German shell-fire. To the left of Lens our Midland troops had some hard fighting in front of the Cité du Moulin, and gave a terrible handling to the Eleventh Reserve Division, who have previously suffered on the Canadian front, so that they were disgusted to find themselves near their old enemies again. They relieved the Fifty-sixth Division, which is down to one-seventh of its strength since fighting against the Leinsters in the Bois-en-Hache, near Vimy. The raid farther north inflicted frightful losses on the enemy in his dug-outs. In one big tunnelled dug-out not a man escaped.

The attack at Oppy, in the south, was a successful advance by Warwickshire lads and other English troops, who followed a great barrage into the enemy's front-trench system and captured all those of the garrison who were not quick enough to escape. They were men of the Fifth Bavarian Division, which is one of the best in the German army, and made up of very tough fellows.

So the evening ended in our favour, and our losses were not heavy, I am told. Not heavy, though always the price of victory has to be paid by that harvest of wounded who came back under the Red Cross down the country lanes of France.

VIII

THE TRAGEDY AT LOMBARTZYDE

JULY 13

THE Germans have claimed a victory near Lombartzyde, and it is true that by heavy gun-fire they have driven us from our defences in a wedge-shaped tract of sand-dunes between the sea and the Yser Canal. This reverse of ours is not a great defeat. It is only a tragic episode of human suffering such as one must expect in war. But what is great—great in spiritual

value and heroic memory—is the way in which our men fought against overwhelming odds and under annihilating fire, and did not try to escape nor talk of surrender, but held this ground until there was no ground but only a zone of bloody wreckage, and still fought until most of them were dead or disabled.

The men who did that were the King's Royal Rifles and Northamptons of the 1st Division, and this last stand of theirs beyond the Yser Canal will not be forgotten as long as human valour is remembered by us. It is wonderful to think that after three years of war the spirit of our men should still be so high and proud that they will stand to certain death like this. Those men who came back from the other side of the canal came back wounded, and had to swim back. They were a remnant of those who have stayed, lying out there now in the churned-up sand, or have been carried back to German hospitals. They were soldiers of the Northamptons and the Sixtieth. Among the King's Royal Rifles there were many London lads, from the old city which we used to think overcivilized and soft. Well, it was men like that who have shed their blood upon the sand-dunes, so that this tract by the sea is consecrated by one of the most tragic episodes in the history of this war.

It was on the seashore, when a high wind ruffled the waters on the morning of July 10, that the enemy began his attack with a deadly fire. His position was in a network of trenches, tunnels, concrete emplacements, and breastworks of thick sand-bag walls built down from the coast to the south of Lombartzyde. Facing him were other trenches and breastworks which we had recently taken over from the French. Behind our men was the Yser Canal, with pontoon bridges crossing to Nieuport and Nieuport-les-Bains. Without these bridges there was no way back or round for the men holding the lines in the dunes. The enemy began early in the morning by putting a barrage down on our front-line system of defences from a large number of batteries of heavy howitzers. Most of his shells were at least as large as 5·9's, and for one long hour they swept up and down our front, smashing breastworks and emplacements and flinging up storms of sand. After that hour the enemy altered his line of fire. There was a five minutes' pause, five minutes of breathing-space for men still left alive among many dead, and then the wall of shells crossed the canal and stayed there for another hour, churning up the sand with a tornado of steel.

The guns then lifted to the front line again, and for another hour continued their work of destruction, pausing for one of those short silences which gave men hope that the bombardment had ceased. It had not ceased. It travelled again to the support line and stayed smashing there for sixty minutes—then across the canal again, then back all over again.

There was one interval of a whole quarter of an hour, and the officers had time to tell their men that it must be a fight to the death, because the position must be held until that death. There must have been few of them who did not know that after that bombardment they would meet the enemy face to face if they still remained alive.

The commanding officer of the Sixtieth became convinced by three o'clock in the afternoon that all this destructive fire was preparatory to a big attack. He saw that his bridges had gone behind him, so that there was no way of escape, and he saw that the enemy was trying to cut off all means of relief and communication. He tried to get messages through, but without success. Two shells came into his battalion headquarters, killing and wounding some of the officers and men crowded in this sand-bag shelter and dug-out in the dune. He took the survivors into a tunnel bored by the miners along the seashore, and here for a time they were able to carry on. But it was almost impossible to get out to reconnoitre the situation, or to give some word of comfort or courage to men standing to arms amongst the wreckage. Flights of hostile aeroplanes were overhead, and they flew low and poured machine-gun fire at any living man who showed. Away behind they were searching for our batteries.

At 6.15 all the German batteries broke into drum-fire and flung shells over the whole of our position for three-quarters of an hour without a second's pause. After all these previous barrages it reached the utmost heights of hellishness, destroying what had already been destroyed, sweeping all this wide tract of sand-dunes right away from the coast to the south of Lombartzyde with flame and smoke and steel, and reaping another harvest of death.

There are many details of this action which may never be known. No man saw it from other ground, and those who were across that bank of the Yser could see very little beyond their own neighbourhood of bursting shells. But a sergeant of

the Northamptons, who had an astounding escape, saw the first three waves of German marines advance with bombing parties. That was shortly after seven o'clock in the evening. They were in heavy numbers against a few scattered groups of English soldiers still left alive after a day of agony and blood. They came forward bombing in a crescent formation, one horn of the crescent trying to work round behind the flank of the Rifles on the seashore as the other tried to outflank the Northamptons on the right.

A party of German machine-gunners crept along the edge of the sands, taking advantage of the low tide, and enfiladed the support line, now a mere mash of sand, in which some wounded and unwounded men held out, and swept them with bullets. Another party of the marines made straight for the tunnel, which was now the battalion headquarters of the Sixtieth, and poured liquid fire down it. Then they passed on, but as if uncertain of having completed their work, came back after a time and bombed it. Even then there was at least one man not killed in that tunnel. He stayed there among the dead till night and then crept out and swam across the canal. Two platoons of Riflemen fought to the last man, refusing to surrender. One little group of five lay behind a bank of sand, and fired with rifles and bombs until they were destroyed.

Meanwhile the Northamptons, on the right, were fighting desperately. Seeing that the German marines were trying to get behind them on the right flank and that they had not the strength to resist this, they got a message through to some troops farther down in front of Lombartzyde to form a barrier so that the enemy could not come through, and these fought their way grimly up, thrusting back the enemy's storm troops, and then made a defensive block through which the marines could not force their way.

The Northamptons fought without any chance of escape, without any hope except that of a quick finish. The German marines brought up a machine-gun and fixed it behind the place where the Northampton officers had established their headquarters, and fired up it. Our machine-guns were out of action, filled with sand or buried in sand. One gunner managed to get his weapon into position, but it jammed at once, and with a curse on it, he flung it into the water of the Yser, and then jumped in and swam back. Another gunner lay by the

side of his machine-gun, hit twice by shells, so that he could not work it. One of his comrades wanted to drag him off to the canal bank, in the hope of swimming back with him. To linger there a minute meant certain death. "Don't mind about me," said the machine-gunner of the Northamptons. "Smash my gun and get back." There was no time for both, so the gun was smashed and the wounded man stayed on the wrong side of the bank.

The fighting lasted for an hour and a half after the beginning of the infantry attack. It was over at 8.30. The wounded sergeant of the Northamptons who swam back saw the last of the struggle. He saw a little group of his own officers, not more than six of them, surrounded by marine bombers, fighting to the end with their revolvers. The picture of these six boys out there in the sand, with their dead lying around them, refusing to yield and fighting on to a certain death, is one of the memories of this war that should not be allowed to die.

Over the Yser Canal men were trying to swim, men dripping with blood and too weak to swim, and men who could not swim. Some gallant fellow on the Nieuport side—there is an idea that it was a Lancashire man—swam across with a rope under heavy fire and fixed it so that men could drag themselves across. So the few survivors came over, and so we know, at least in its broad outline, how all this happened. It is a tragic tale, and there will be tears when it is read. But in the tragedy there is the splendour of these poor boys, young soldiers all, who fought with a courage as great as any in history, and have raised a cross of sacrifice beyond the Yser, before which all men of our race will bare their heads.

The enemy did not reach the canal bank, but stayed some 300 yards away from it. He was beaten back from the trenches south of Lombartzyde, and gained no ground there.

IX

THE STRUGGLE FOR HELL WOOD

JUNE 14

BETWEEN Wytschaete and Messines is a wood, horribly ravaged by shell-fire, called on our trench-maps Bois de l'Enfer, or Hell Wood. North of it was a German strong point, with

barbed-wire defences and heavy blocks of concrete, called l'Enfer—Hell itself—and south of it, behind a labyrinth of trenches, some broken walls above a nest of dug-outs, known as Hell Farm. These filthy places were central defences of great fortified positions held by the enemy just north of Messines, and just south of Wytschaete, and round them and beyond them was some of the fiercest fighting which happened on that day of battle when we gained the Messines Ridge.

Until now I have left out that part of the battle story—one cannot write the history of a battle like that in a day or two—but it must be told, because it was vastly important to the success of the general action, and the troops engaged in it showed the finest courage. They were men of the 25th Division, including Cheshires, Irish Rifles, Lancashire Fusiliers, North Lancs, and Worcesters, and other country lads who were blooded in battles of the Somme, where once I watched them surging up the high slopes under a heavy fire and fighting their way into the German trenches. In this battle of Hell Wood they were so wonderful in the cool, steady way they fought that when an airman came down to report their progress he said to their General, "I knew your fellows, because they advanced in perfect order as though on parade."

Before the battle, when they lay about Wulverghem, opposite the fortress positions they had to attack, they did some great digging in the face of the enemy assembly trenches, as plain as pikestaves to German observers, and advertising, as did the enormous ammunition dumps, new batteries and wagon-lines, the awful stroke of attack that was being prepared.

It was a record night's work of twelve hundred Lancashire lads who went out into the dead strip between their trenches and the enemy's, and dug like demons. When at dawn they crept back to their own lines they left behind them a trench four-feet-six deep and 1050 yards long for a jump-out line on the day of battle. The enemy officers saw it, and must have sickened at the sight. They marked it on their maps, which were captured afterwards. It was frightful ground in front of these troops of ours, as I have seen it partly for myself from ground about the mine-craters looking over Hell Wood.

The first part of our men's advance after the moment of attack was hardly checked, and they went forward in open order as steadily as though in the practice fields, through

buttercups and daisies. Their trouble came later, when they found themselves under machine-gun fire from Hell Wood, on the left of their advance line, and from Hell Farm in front of them. It was a body of Cheshires who side-slipped to the left to deal with that fire from the wood. They made a dash for those scarred tree-trunks, from which a stream of bullets poured, and fought their way through to the German machine-gun emplacements, though a number of them fell. As they closed upon the enemy the German gunners ceased fire in a hurry. Many of them stopped abruptly, with bullets in their brains, and fifty men surrendered with fourteen machine-guns. Hell Farm was gained and held, and at the top of Hell Wood the Cheshires routed out another machine-gun, so that all was clear in this part of the field.

Meanwhile the main body of assaulting troops—Lancashire Fusiliers, North Lancs, Irish Rifles, and Worcesters—had passed on to another system of defences known as October Trench, which was a barrier straight across their way. Here, as they drew close, they came to a dead halt against a broad belt of wire uncut by our gun-fire, and hideously tangled in coils with sharp barbs. Behind, as some of the officers knew, the enemy had brought up twenty-six machine-guns, enough to sweep down a whole battalion held by wire like this. Even now the men don't know how they went over that wire. They knew instantly that they must get across or die. From October Support Trench, farther back, with another belt of uncut wire in front of it, heavy fire was coming from Germans who had their heads up. "Over you go, men," shouted the officers. The men flung themselves over, scrambled over, rolled over, tearing hands and faces and bits of flesh on those rusty prongs, but getting over or through somehow and anyhow. Parties of them raced on to October Support Trench, flung themselves against that wire and got, bleeding and scratched, to the other side, unless they were killed first. Some of them fell. It was the most deadly episode of the day, but the Germans paid a ghastly price for this resistance, and 300 German dead lie on that ground round the old ruins of Middle Farm behind the wire.

Away back when fighting here began was a body of Irish Rifles who had gone as far as they had been told to go. They saw what was happening, watched those other men flinging

themselves against the barbed hedge. "To hell with staying here," shouted one of them. "To hell with it," said others. "We could do a power of good up there."

"Come on then, boys," said the first men, beginning to run. They ran fast towards the end of the wire belt, slipped round it, and fell on the flank of the enemy. It was timely help to the other men, some of whom owe their lives to it.

The second phase of the battle began when another body of the same troops passed through those who had already assaulted and won their ground, and went forward to a new line beyond. They passed through in perfect order, which is a most difficult manœuvre in battle when the ground is covered with troops who have already been fighting, with wounded men and stretcher-bearers, and souvenir-hunters and moppers-up and runners, and all the tumult of new-gained ground. But in long, unbroken waves the fresh troops lined up beyond these crowds, and made ready to advance upon the new line of attack. Again, groups of them had to be separated from the main body in order to seize isolated positions on the wings, where groups of Germans were holding out and sweeping our flanks with fire.

North-east and south-east of Lumm Farm were bits of trench from which the enemy was routed after sharp bouts of fighting. Beyond were some holed walls called Nameless Farm, and these were captured before the call of "cease firing," which was the signal for the party to halt while our guns began a new bombardment over the new line of attack.

It was this silence which scared an officer of the Cheshires, who had led his men away forward to capture a body of Germans trying to escape from Despagne Farm, right out in the blue this side of Owl Trench, which was the next position to be attacked, after our guns had dealt with it. A sergeant and two men of the Cheshires ran right into Despagne Farm and bayoneted the German machine-gunners who had been spraying bullets on our men. Then the officer seemed to feel his heart stop. He looked at his wrist-watch, and was shocked at the time it gave. The realization of the frightful menace approaching as every second passed made every nerve in his body tingle. It was our new bombardment. A vast storm of explosives which was about to sweep over this ground, already pitted with deep shell-holes, it seemed as though nothing could

save this body of Cheshires, who had gone too far and could not get back before their own guns killed them. There was only one chance of escape for any of them, and that was for each man to dive into one of those eight-feet-deep shell-holes and crouch low, scratching himself into the shelving sides before the hellish storm of steel broke loose. The Cheshires did this, flung themselves into the pits, lay quaking there like toads under a harrow, and hugged the earth as the bombardment burst out and swept over them. By an amazing freak of fortune it swept over them quickly, and there were only two casualties among all those men huddled in holes, expecting certain death. A bit of luck, said the men, getting up and gasping. Weaker men would have been broken by shell-shock and terror-stricken. These Cheshires went on, took the next German defences and many prisoners, and then dug in according to orders and prepared for anything that might happen in the way of trouble. It was the German counter-attack which happened. Six hundred men came debouching out of a gully called Blawepoortbeck, with its mouth opposite Despagne Farm. The Cheshires had their machine-guns in position and their rifles ready. They held back their fire until the German column was within short range. Then they fired volley after volley, and those 600 men found themselves in a valley of death, and few escaped.

PART V

THE BATTLES OF FLANDERS

I

BREAKING THE SALIENT

JULY 31

THE battle which all the world has been expecting has begun. After weeks of intense bombardment, not on our side only, causing, as we know, grave alarm throughout Germany and anxiety in our enemy's command, we launched a great attack this morning on a front stretching, roughly, from the River Lys to Boesinghe. We have gained ground everywhere, and with the help of French troops, who are fighting shoulder to shoulder with our own men, in the northern part of the line above Boesinghe, we have captured the enemy's positions across the Yser Canal and thrust him back from a wide stretch of country between Pilkem and Hollebeke. He is fighting desperately at various points, with a great weight of artillery behind him, and has already made strong counter-attacks and flung up his reserves in order to check this sweeping advance. Many Tanks have gone forward with our infantry, sometimes in advance and sometimes behind, according to the plan of action mapped out for them, and have done better than well against several of the enemy's strong points, where, for a time, our men were held up by machine-gun fire.

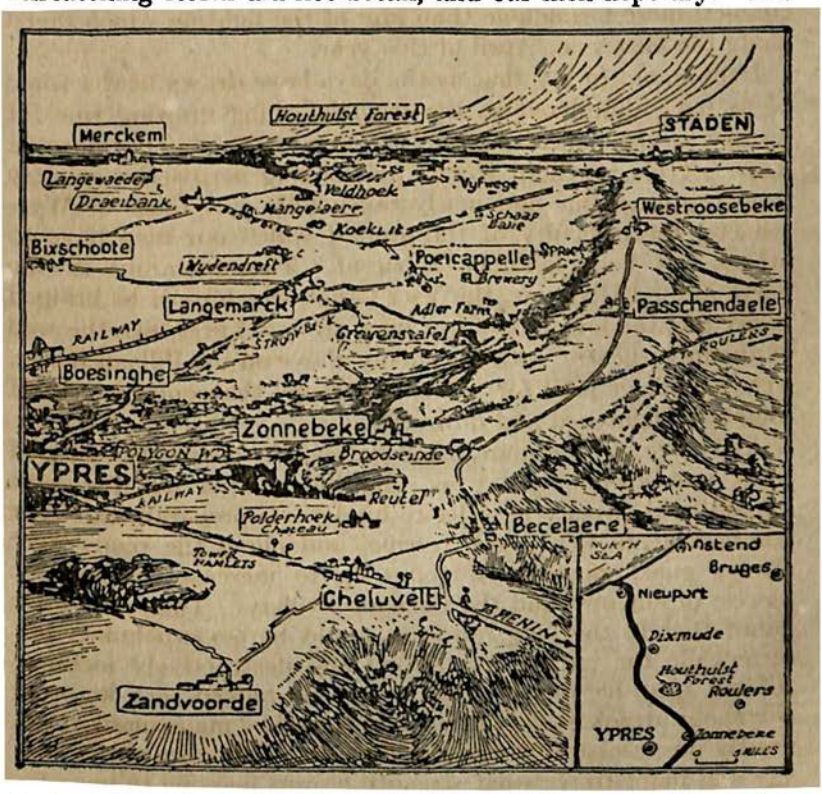
So far our losses are not heavy, and many of these are lightly wounded, but it is likely that the enemy's resistance will be stronger as the hours pass, because he realizes the greatness of our menace, and will, beyond doubt, bring up all the strength he has to save himself from a complete disaster. During the past few weeks the correspondents in the field have not even hinted at the approach of the battle that has opened to-day,

though other people have not been so discreet, and the enemy himself has sounded the alarm. But we have seen many of the preparations for this terrific adventure in the north, and have counted the days when all these men we have seen passing along the roads, all these guns, and the tidal wave of ammunition which has flowed northwards should be ready for this new conflict, more formidable than any of the fighting which raged along the lines since April of this year.

I am bound to say that as the days have drawn nearer some of us have shuddered at the frightful thing growing ripe for history as the harvests of France have ripened. Poring over maps of this northern front, and looking across the country from the coast-line and newly taken hills, like those of Wytschaete, the difficulty of the ground which our men have to attack has been horribly apparent. Those swamps in the north around Dixmude, the Yser Canal, which must be bridged under fire, the low flats of our lines around Ypres, like the well of an amphitheatre, with the enemy above on the Pilkem Ridge, were so full of peril for attacking troops that optimism itself might be frightened and downcast.

As I have written many times lately, the enemy has massed great gun-power against us, and has poured out fire with unparalleled ferocity in order to hinder our preparations. Our bombardments were more terrific, and along the roads were always guns, guns, guns, going up to increase the relative powers of our own and the German artillery. There was little doubt that in the long run ours would be overwhelming, but meanwhile the enemy was strong and destructively inclined. All the time he was puzzled and nerve-racked, not knowing where our attack would fall upon him, and he made many raids, mostly unsuccessful, to find out our plans, while we raided him day and night to see what strength he was massing to meet us. Russia lured him, and in spite of our threat he has sent off some six divisions, I believe, to his Eastern theatre of operations, but at the same time he relieved many of the divisions which had been broken by our fire in the lines, replacing them by his freshest and strongest troops. They did not remain fresh, even after only a few hours, for our guns caught some of them during their reliefs, as late as two o'clock this morning in the case of the 52nd Reserve Division, so that they stepped straight into an inferno of fire.

The weather was against us, as many times before a battle. Yesterday it was a day of rain and heavy, sodden clouds, so that observation was almost impossible for our flying men and kite-balloons, and our artillery was greatly hampered. The night was dark and moist, but luck was with us so far that a threatening storm did not break, and our men kept dry. The



darkness was in our favour, and the assaulting troops were able to form up for attack very close to the enemy's lines—lines of shell-craters in fields of craters from which our storms of fire had swept away all trenches, all buildings, and all trees. The enemy held these forward positions lightly by small groups of men, who knew themselves to be doomed, and waited for that doom in their pits like animals in death-traps. In their second-line defences, less damaged, but awful enough in wreckage of earthworks, the enemy was in greater strength, and from these

positions flares went up all through the night, giving a blurred white light along the barriers of mist, and rising high into the cloudy sky. Scores of thousands of our men, lying on the wet earth in puddles and mud-holes, watched those flares and hoped they would not be revealed before the second when they would have to rise and go forward to meet their luck. They lay there silently, never stirring, nor coughing, nor making any rattle of arms, while German shells passed over them or smashed among them, killing and wounding some of those who lay close. Enemy aircraft came out in the night bolder than by day, since they have been chased and attacked and destroyed in great numbers by British flying men, determined to get the mastery of the air, and to blind the enemy's eyes before this battle, and beyond any doubt successful as far as this day goes. The night-birds swooped over places where they thought our batteries were hidden and dropped bombs, but as they could see nothing their aim was bad, and they did no important damage, if any at all. So the hours of the night crept by, enormously long to all those men of ours waiting for the call to rise and go. Our gun-fire had never stopped for weeks in its steady slogging hammering, but shortly after half-past three this ordinary noise of artillery quickened and intensified to a monstrous and overwhelming tumult. It was so loud that twelve miles behind the lines big houses moved and were shaken with a great trembling. People farther away than that awakened with fear and went to their windows and stared out into the darkness, and saw wild fireballs in the sky, and knew that men were fighting and dying in Flanders in one of the great battles of the world. This morning I watched the fires of this battle from an observation-post on the edge of the salient. I knew what I should have seen if there had been any light, for I saw those places a day or two ago from the same spot. I should have seen the ghost-city of Ypres, and the curve of the salient round by Pilkem, St.-Julien, and Zillebeke, and then Warneton and Houthem below the Messines Ridge. But now there was no light, but hundreds of sharp red flashes out of deep gulfs of black smoke and black mist. The red flashes were from our forward batteries and heavy guns, and over all this battlefield, where hundreds of thousands of men were at death-grips, the heavy, smoke-laden vapours of battle and of morning fog swirled and writhed between clumps

of trees and across the familiar places of death round Ypres, hiding everything and great masses of men. The drum-fire of the guns never slackened for hours. At nine o'clock in the morning it beat over the countryside with the same rafale of terror as it had started before four o'clock. Strangely above this hammering and thundering of two thousand guns or more of ours, answered by the enemy's barrage, railway whistles screamed from trains taking up more shells, and always more shells, to the very edge of the fighting-lines, and in between the massed batteries, using them as hard as they could be unloaded.

Over at Warneton and Oostaverne, in the valley below the Messines Ridge, the enemy was pouring fire along our line, shells of the heaviest calibre, which burst monstrously, and raised great pillars of white smoke. It was a valley of death there, and our men were in it, and fighting for the slopes beyond.

It is a battle, so far, of English, Scottish, and Welsh troops, with some of the Anzacs—New-Zealanders as well as Australians—and all along the line they have fought hard and with good success over ground as difficult as any that has ever been a battlefield, because of the canal and the swamps and the hollow cup of the Ypres area, with the enemy on the rim of it.

Among the battalions who fought hardest were the Liverpools, the South and North Lancashires, the Liverpool Scottish and Liverpool Irish, the Lancashire Fusiliers, Lancashire Regiment, the King's Royal Rifles, West Kents, Surreys, Durham Light Infantry, the Cheshires, Warwicks, Staffords, Sussex, Wiltshires and Somersets, the Royal Irish Rifles, the Black Watch, Camerons, Gordons and Royal Scots, the Welsh battalions, and the Guards. From north to south the Divisions engaged were the Guards, the 38th (Welsh), the 51st (Highland), the 39th, the 55th, the 15th (Scottish), the 8th, 30th, 41st, 19th, and Anzacs on the extreme right.

One can always tell from the walking wounded whether things are going ill or well. At least, they know the fire they have had against them, and the ease or trouble with which they have taken certain ground, and the measure of their sufferings. So now, with an awful doubt in my mind, because of the darkness and the anxiety of men conducting the battle

over the signal-lines, and that awful drum-fire beating into one's ears and soul, I was glad to get first real tidings from long streams of lightly wounded fellows coming along from the dressing-station. They were lightly wounded, but pitiful to see, because of the blood that drenched them—bloody kilts and bloody khaki, and bare arms and chests, with the cloth cut away from their wounds, and bandaged heads, from which tired eyes looked out. One would not expect good tidings from men who had suffered like these, but they spoke of a good day, of good progress, of many prisoners, and of an enemy routed and surrendering. "A good day"—that was their first phrase, though for them it meant the loss of a limb or sharp pain anyhow, and remembrance of the blood and filth of battle. They were eager to describe their fighting, and I saw again the pride of men in the courage of their comrades, forgetting their own, which had been as great. These lads told me how they lay out in the night, and how the German planes came over, bombing them; how they rose and went forward in attack. The enemy was quickly turned out of his front line of shell-craters, and there were not many of him there. In the second line he was thickly massed, but some of them threw up their hands at once, crying "Mercy!"

The Scots came up against a strong emplacement fitted with machine-guns, and here the German gunners fired rapidly, so that our men were checked. They rushed the place, and at the last a German hoisted a white flag, but even then others fired, and I met one young Scot to-day who had a comrade killed after that sign of surrender.

Beyond Ypres, on the way to Menin, there was a big tunnel where our English lads expected trouble, as it could hold hundreds of Germans. But when they came to the tunnel and ferreted down it they only found forty-one men, who surrendered at once. Some of the enemy's troops were quite young boys of the 1918 class, but most of them were older and tougher men. The success of the day is shared by English troops, including the Guards, with the Welsh, who fought abreast of them with equal heroism, and with Scottish and Anzacs. The Welsh have wiped out the most famous German regiment of the Third Guards Division, known as the "Cockchafers."

Fighting with us, the French troops kept pace with their usual gallantry, carrying all their objectives according to the

time-table. In one great and irresistible assault, these troops of two nations swept across the enemy lines and have reached heights on the Pilkem Ridge, as I hope to tell to-morrow in greater detail. For the day, it is enough to say that our success has been as great as we dared to hope.

II

FROM PILKEM RIDGE TO HOLLEBEKE

AUGUST 1

THE weather is still abominable. Heavy rain-storms have water-logged the battlefields, and there are dense mists over all the countryside. It is bad for fighting on land, and worse for fighting in the air. But fighting goes on. Yesterday the enemy made strong counter-attacks at many points of our new line, and especially to the north of Frezenberg, west of Zonnebeke, where, at three in the afternoon, his infantry advanced upon the 15th (Scottish) Division after a violent bombardment. They were swept down by artillery and machine-gun fire. At five o'clock they came on again, moving suddenly out of a dense smoke-barrage, and gained 300 yards of ground. Our guns poured shells on to this ground, and at nine o'clock last night our men went behind the barrage and regained this position. The enemy's gun-fire is intense over a great part of the country taken from him, and his long-range guns are shelling far behind the lines. Generally the situation is exactly the same as it stood at the end of the first day of battle, when our advance was firm and complete at the northern end of the attack, where the Guards and the Welsh had swept over the Pilkem Ridge without great trouble, and where farther south the troops who had advanced beyond St.-Julien had to fall back a little, partly under the pressure of counter-attacks, but chiefly in order to get into line with their right wing, which had been engaged in the hardest fighting, and had not reached the same depth of country. That was in the wooded ground south-east of the salient, where the enemy had a large number of machine-guns in the cover of Glencorse Copse, Inverness Wood, and Shrewsbury Forest, and repulsed the very desperate attacks of the 8th and 30th Divisions.

Outside one copse there was a very strong position, known to

our men as Stirling Castle. It was once a French château, surrounded by a park and outbuildings, long destroyed but made into a strong point with concrete emplacements. Rapid machine-gun fire poured out of this place against our men, but it was captured after several rushes. The trenches in front of it were also gained by the Royal Scots and Durham Light Infantry of the 8th Division. Later a counter-attack was launched against them by the Germans of one of the young classes, and here at least these lads, who do not seem to have fought very well elsewhere, came on like tiger cubs and gained some of their trenches back. From all the woods in this neighbourhood there was an incessant sweep of machine-gun bullets, and, as I have already said in earlier dispatches, many small counter-attacks were launched from them, without much success, but strong enough to make progress difficult to our men, now that the weather had set in badly, so that our guns were hampered by lack of aeroplane observation. All through the night and yesterday the enemy's barrage-fire was fiercely sustained, and our men dug themselves in as best they could, and took cover in shell-holes.

Hard fighting had happened that day southward and on the right of our attack past Hollebeke and the line between Oostaverne and Warneton. Opposite Hollebeke there were English county troops of the 41st Division—West Kents, Surreys, Hampshires, Gloucesters, Oxford and Bucks, and Durham Light Infantry—and they went "over the bags," as they call it, in almost pitch-darkness, like the men on either side of them. This was the reason of an accident which was almost a tragedy. As they went forward over that shell-destroyed ground they left behind them Germans hidden in shell-pits, who sniped our men in the rear, and picked off many of them until later in the day they were routed out. Beyond this open country the ruins of Hollebeke were full of cellars, made into strong dug-outs, and crowded with Germans who would not come out. They will never come out. Our men flung bombs down into these underground places, and passed on to the line where they stay on the east side of the village. At a little bit of ruin there was some delay because of the machine-guns there, and for some time it was uncertain whether we held the place, as a messenger sent down to report its capture was killed on his journey. Along the line of the railway here there was a row of concrete dug-outs, and a bomber of the Middlesex went up

alone, climbed the embankment, and dropped bombs through their ventilator. So there was not much trouble from them.

In some of the dug-outs in this neighbourhood about a score of bottles of champagne were found, for a feast by German officers. But our soldiers drank it; indeed, one—a Canadian fellow—drank a whole bottle to himself, being very thirsty, and after that he found one of the officers for whom the drink was meant, but for the fortune of war. He was lying on his truckle bed below ground, hoping, perhaps, to be asleep when death should come to him out of the tornado of fire which had swept over him for days. "Come out of that," shouted the Canadian, and then, having left his arms behind him, dragged him out by the hair.

South of Hollebeke three little rivers run. One of them is the Rozebeek, and another is the Wambeek, and the third is the Blaupoortbeek, and there is a small ridge between each of them, and a copse between them. Two bodies of English troops of the 19th and 37th Divisions—Lancashires, Cheshires, Warwicks, Staffords and Wiltshires, Somersets, Bedfords, South Lancashires, and Royal Fusiliers—attacked these positions, those on the right making their assault four hours later than those on the left. They had already pushed out by small raids and rushes half-way to the copse before the attack, and when the signal to go forward came they made the rest of the way very quickly, so that the copse fell. The enemy here fought hard, and had cover in concrete emplacements, with underground entries. Beyond he held out stoutly under machine-gun and rifle barrage. Meanwhile, on the extreme right of attack were the Australians and New-Zealanders in the ground below Warneton. It was difficult country. The enemy had gone to great trouble to wire his hedges and camouflage the shell-holes with wire netting, below which he hid machine-guns and snipers. The village of La Basseville, like all the places we call villages, a mere huddle of broken bricks, had already been taken once and lost in a counter-attack. Now it was the New-Zealanders who took it. The same thing happened as at Hollebeke. The enemy refused to leave his dug-outs and was bombed to death in them. "Can't make any use of the cellars," came a message through, "as they are choked with dead." Not far from La Basseville was the stump of an old windmill standing lonely on a knoll.

Because of its observation it was important to get, and it was the Australians who captured it after hard fighting. At 9.30 in the morning the Germans came out in waves across the Warneton—Gapaard road and so encircled the windmill that the Australians had to draw back and leave it. But at midnight, after it had been shelled for several hours, they went back, routed out the garrison, and now hold it again. At half-past three the same afternoon the New-Zealanders were counter-attacked at La Basseville, but the Germans were beaten back.

So the fortunes of the day were alternating, but at the end of it the position became clear. We had made and held all the ground that we intended. Then our men dug in, and the rain, which had begun on the afternoon of the battle, grew heavier. It has rained ever since. The ground is all a swamp and the shell-holes are ponds. The Army lies wet, and all the foulness of Flemish weather in winter is upon them in August. Through the mist the enemy's shell-fire never ceases, and our guns reply with long bombardments and steady barrages. The walking wounded come back over miles of churned-up ground, dodging the shells, and when they get down to the clearing-stations they are caked with mud and very weary. War is not a blithe business, even when the sun is shining. In this gloom and filth it is more miserable.

The weather has been bad for flying men. Impossible, one would say, looking up at the low-lying storm-clouds. Yet on the day of battle our airmen went out and, baulked of artillery work, flew over the enemy's country and spread terror there. It was a flying terror which, when told in the barest words of these boys, is stranger than old mythical stories of flying horses and dragons on the wing. Imagine one of these winged engines swooping low over one as one walks along a road far from the lines, and above the roar of its engine the sharp crack of a revolver with a bullet meant for you. Imagine one of these birds hovering above one's cottage roof and firing machine-gun bullets down the chimneys, and then flying round to the front and squirting a stream of lead through the open door, and, after leaving death inside, soaring up into a rain-cloud. That, and much more, was done on July 31. These airmen of ours attacked the German troops on the march and scattered them, dropped bombs on their camps and aerodromes, flying so low that their wheels skirted the grass, and were

seldom more than a few yards above the tree-tops. The narrative of one man begins with his flight over the enemy's country, crossing canals and roads as low as thirty feet, until he came to a German aerodrome. The men there paid no attention, thinking this low flier was one of theirs, until a bomb fell on the first shed. Then they ran in all directions panic-stricken. The English pilot skimmed round to the other side of the shed and played his machine-gun through the open doors, then soared a little and gave the second shed a bomb. He flew round and released a bomb for the third shed, but failed with the fourth, because the handle did not act quickly enough. So he spilt his bomb between the shed and a railway train standing still there. By this time a German machine-gun had got to work upon him, but he swooped right down upon it, scattering the gunners with a burst of bullets, and flew across the sheds again, firing into them at twenty feet. His ammunition drum was exhausted, and he went up to a cloud to change, and then came down actually to the ground, tripping across the grass on dancing wheels, and firing into the sheds where the mechanics were cowering. Then he tired of this aerodrome and flew off, overtaking two German officers on horses. He dived at them and the horses bolted. He came upon a column of 200 troops on the march, and swooped above their heads with a stream of bullets until they ran into hedges and ditches. He was using a lot of ammunition, and went up into a cloud to fix another drum. Two German aeroplanes came up to search for him, and he flew to meet them and drove one down so that it crashed to earth. German soldiers gathered round it, and our fellow came down to them and fired into their crowd. A little later he flew over a passenger train and pattered bullets through its windows, and then, having no more ammunition, went home.

There was a boy of eighteen in one of our aerodromes the night before the battle, and he was very glum because he was not allowed to go across the German lines next day on account of his age and inexperience. After many pleadings he came to his squadron commander at night in his pyjamas and said, "Look here, sir, can't I go?" So he was allowed to go, and set out in company with another pilot in another machine. But he soon was alone, because he missed the other man in a rain-storm. His first adventure was with a German motor-car

with two officers. He gave chase, saw it turn into side roads, and followed. Then he came low and used his machine-gun. One of the officers fired an automatic pistol at him, so our boy thought that a good challenge and, leaving go of his machine-gun, pulled out his own revolver, and there was the strangest duel between a boy in the air and a man in a car. The aeroplane was fifty feet high then, but dropped to twenty just as the car pulled up outside a house. The young pilot shot past, but turned and saw the body of one officer being dragged indoors. He swooped over the house and fired his machine-gun into it, and then sent a Very-light into the car, hoping to set it on fire. Presently he was attacked by a bombardment from machine-guns, "Archies," and light rockets, so he rose high and took cover in the clouds. But it was not the last episode of his day out. He saw some infantry crossing a wooden bridge and dived at them with rapid bursts of machine-gun fire. They ran like rabbits from a shot-gun, and when he came round again he saw four or five dead lying on the bridge. From the ditches men fired at him with rifles, so he stooped low and strafed them, and then went home quite pleased with himself.

There were scores of flying men who did these things. The pilots of two units alone flew an aggregate of 396 hours 25 minutes, and fired 11,258 rounds of machine-gun bullets at ground targets, to say nothing of Very-lights. Those machines were not out in France for exhibition purposes, as gentlemen now abed in England are pleased to think. All this sounds romantic, and certainly there is the romance of youthful courage and fearless spirit. But apart from human courage, the ugliness and foulness of war grow greater month by month, and if anybody speaks to me of war's romance I will tell him of things I have seen to-day and yesterday and make his blood run cold. For the sum of human agony is high.

III

THE BEGINNING OF THE RAINS

AUGUST 1

A VIOLENT rain-storm began yesterday afternoon after our advance across the enemy's lines to the Pilkem Ridge and the northern curve of the Ypres salient, and it now veils all the

battlefield in a dense mist. It impedes the work of our airmen and makes our artillery co-operation with the infantry more difficult, and adds to the inevitable hardships of our men out there in the new lines where the ground has been cratered by our shell-fire into one wild quagmire of pits. To the enemy it is not altogether a blessing. His airmen get no observation of our movements, and his gunners do not find their targets, while his poor, wretched infantry, lying out in open ground or in woods where they get no cover from our fire, must be in a frightful condition, unable to get food because of our barrages behind them, and wet to the skin.

The enemy's command has been unable to organize any effective counter-attacks, and so far has sent forward small bodies of storm troops moving vaguely to uncertain objectives and smashed by our fire before they have reached our lines. There were many of these attacks yesterday. Against the Lancashire regiments of the 15th and the Scots of the 55th Division they were repeated all through the day, beginning at three o'clock in the afternoon, and coming again at eleven o'clock, 1.45, and 7.15 this morning.

The Lehr Regiment, whom the Kaiser called his brave Coburgers during the battles of the Somme, were very severely mauled yesterday and suffered heavy losses. Both the 235th Division and the Third Guards Division, engaged by our men on the Steenbeek line, have been shattered. So great has been the alarm of the enemy at the menace to his line that he has been rushing up reserves by omnibuses and light railways to the firing-line over tracks which are shelled by us day and night. The suffering of all the German troops, huddled together in exposed places, must be as hideous as anything in the agony of mankind, slashed to bits by storms of shells and urged forward to counter-attacks which they know will be their death.

I saw this morning large numbers of prisoners taken during the past twenty-four hours and just brought in. They had the look of men who have been through hell. They were drenched with rain, which poured down their big steel helmets. Their top-boots were full of water, which squelched out at every step, and their sunken eyes stared out of ash-grey faces with the look of sick and hunted animals. Many of them had cramp in the stomach through long exposure and hunger before being

captured, and they groaned loudly and piteously. Many of them wept while being interrogated, protesting bitterly that they hated the war and wanted nothing but peace. They have no hope of victory for their country. An advance into Russia fills them with no new illusions, but seems to them only a lengthening of the general misery. They do not hide the sufferings of their people at home, and say that in the towns there is bitter want, and only in the rural districts is there enough to eat. In the field they are filled with gloomy forebodings, and live in terror of our tremendous gun-fire. The older men, non-commissioned officers who have come back after wounds, and other soldiers of long training, say that the boys of the young classes who are now filling up the ranks have no staying power under shell-fire and no fighting spirit. Among the prisoners I saw to-day I think about a quarter of them, or perhaps a little less, were these young boys, anæmic-looking lads, with terror in their eyes. The others were more hardy-looking men, though pale and worn. It is certain that they made no great fight yesterday when our men were near them, except when they still had cover in concrete emplacements. And it is no wonder that all fight has gone out of them. Some even of our own men were startled and stunned by the terrific blast of our gun-fire. Some of these men have told me that when they went forward to get into line before the attack, they had to pass through mile after mile of our batteries, the heavy guns behind, and gradually reaching the lighter batteries forward, until they arrived at the field-guns, so thickly placed that at some points they were actually wheel to wheel. The night was dark, but there was no darkness among these batteries. Their flashes lit up their neighbourhood with lurid torches, blinding the eyes of the troops on the march, and all about the air rocked with the blast of their fire and the noise was so great that men were deafened. As the troops went forward for five or six miles to the assembly-lines flights of shells passed over their heads in a great rush through space, and it was terrifying even to men like one of those I met to-day, who has become familiar with the noise of gun-fire since the early days of Ypres and the fury of the Somme. But the worst came when the field-guns began their rapid fire before yesterday's dawn. It was like the fire of machine-guns in its savage sweep, but instead of machine-gun bullets they were

18-pounder shells, and each report from thousands of guns was a sharp, ear-splitting crack.

An Irish fellow who described his own adventures to me as he lay wounded and told his tale as vividly as a great orator, because of the perfect truth and simplicity of each phrase, said that he and all his comrades hurried to get away from their own lines when the signal of attack came in order to escape from the awful noise. They preferred the greater quietude of the enemy's positions. They went across blasted ground. It had been harrowed by the sweep of fire. Trenches had disappeared, concrete emplacements had been overturned, breastworks had been flung like straws to the wind. The only men who lived were those who were huddled in sections of trench which were between the barrage-lines of our fire. Our men had no fear of what the enemy could do to them. They went forward to find creatures eager to escape from this blazing hell. It was only in redoubts like the Frezenberg Redoubt which had escaped destruction that the German machine-gunners still fought and gave trouble. Many of the enemy must have been buried alive with machine-guns and trench-mortars and bomb stores. But there were other dead not touched by shell-fire, nor by any bullet. They had been killed by our gas attack which had gone before the battle. Rows of them lay clasping their gas-masks, and had not been quick enough before the vapour of death reached them. But others, with their gas-masks on, were dead. One of our men tells me that he came across the bodies of a group of German officers. They belonged to a brigade staff, and they were all masked, with tin beast-like nozzles, and they were all stone dead. It is the vengeance of the gods for that gas, foul and damnable, which they used against us first in the second battle of Ypres and ever since. It is the worst weapon of modern warfare, and has added the blackest terror to all this slaughter of men.

Because there was not great fighting with infantry yesterday, it must not be thought that our men had an easy time. The enemy was quick to put down his barrage, and although it was not anything like our annihilating fire, it was bad enough, as any shell-fire is. I met some young Scots of the Gordons and Camerons to-day, who had been through an episode of a thrilling kind, which was horrible while it lasted. When the signal for attack came yesterday, they were a little mad, like

some of their comrades, because they said they saw the Germans running away on the other side of our wall of shells. Without waiting for the barrage to creep forward, these Scots ran forward right among our own shells, and, by some miracle, many of them escaped being hit, and went forward in pursuit. A party of about a hundred went right beyond their goal and found themselves isolated and out of touch with the main body. They were heavily shelled and attacked by bombing parties. They sent runners back asking for reinforcements, but none came because of their far-flung position. They tried to signal for an artillery barrage to protect them, but this call was not seen. They ran out of ammunition, and saw that death was coming close to them. It touched some men with great chunks of hot shell, and they fell dead in their shell-craters. Other men were buried by the bursts of 5·9's. These boys of the 8/10th Gordons were proud. They did not want to retire, though they knew they had gone too far, but at last, when all their officers had been killed but one, the order was given to this little remnant of men to save their lives and get back if they could. They went back through heavy fire, and I talked with two of them this morning, happy to find themselves alive and bright-eyed fellows still. It is extraordinary what escapes many of them have had. A group of them in the farthest line of advance lay down in craters under a rapid sweep of machine-gun fire from a redoubt in front of them. They watched over the edge of their craters how two Tanks came up, heaving and lurching over the tossed earth, until they were within gun-range of the redoubt. Then they opened fire. But the enemy's gunners had seen them, and tried to get them with direct hits. Most of the shells fell short all around those English lads hiding in the craters. Some of these were buried and some killed. But the others held on to their ground, which is still in our hands.

The stretcher-bearers were magnificent, and worked all day and night searching out the wounded and carrying them back under fire. Many of the German prisoners gladly lent a hand in this work on their way back. At the dressing-stations to-day I saw them giving pickaback to men—ours—who were wounded about the legs and feet. They prefer this work to fighting.

After yesterday's battle our line includes the whole of the

Pilkem Ridge and the ground in the valley beyond to the line of the Steenbeek river, and southwards in a curve that slices off the old Ypres salient. It has been a heavy blow to the enemy. Now it is all rain and mud and blood and beastliness.

IV

PILL-BOXES AND MACHINE-GUNS

AUGUST 3

THE weather is still frightful. It is difficult to believe that we are in August. Rather it is like the foulest weather of a Flemish winter, and all the conditions which we knew through so many dreary months during three winters of war up here in the Ypres salient are with us again. The fields are quagmires, and in shell-crater land, which is miles deep round Ypres, the pits have filled with water. The woods loom vaguely through a wet mist, and road traffic labours through rivers of slime. It is hard luck for our fighting men. But in spite of repeated efforts the enemy has not succeeded in his counter-attacks, after our line withdrew somewhat at the end of the first day south and south-east of St.-Julien. In my first accounts of the battle I did not give full measure to the hardness of the fighting in which some of our troops were engaged, nor to the stubbornness of the enemy's resistance. It is now certain that, whereas many of the German infantry, terror-stricken by our bombardment, surrendered easily enough, others made good use of strong defences not annihilated by our fire, and put up a desperate defence. Fresh troops, like the 221st Division, were flung in by the German command in the afternoon of the first day and made repeated attacks, under cover of the mist, against our men, who were tired after twenty-four hours in the zone of fire, who in some sectors had suffered heavily, but who fought still with a courage which defied defeat. A commanding officer of a Lancashire battalion went to meet some of his men coming back yesterday. They were wet and caked with mud and unshaven and dead-beat, and they had lost many comrades, but they had the spirit to pull themselves up and smile with a light in their eyes when the commanding officer said he was proud of them, because they had done all that men could, and one of them called out cheerily, "When shall we go on again,

sir?" An officer who was left last out of his battalion to hold out in an advanced position said to the padre, who has just visited him in hospital, "I hope the General was not disappointed with us." The General, I am sure, was not disappointed with these men of the 55th Division. No one could think of them without enthusiasm and tenderness, marvelling at their spirit and at the fight they made in tragic hours. Because it was a tragedy to them that after gaining ground they had been asked to take, and not easily nor without losses, they should have to fall back and fight severe rear-guard actions to cover a necessary withdrawal.

These Lancashire men, with many men of the Liverpool battalions, had to attack from Wieltje through successive systems of trenches. This ground is just to the right of St.-Julien and to the left of Frezenberg, below the Gravenstafel Spur, Zonnebeke, and Langemarck. The way lay past a number of German strong points—Beck House, Plum Farm, Pound Farm, and Square Farm—once small farmsteads, long blown to bits, but fortified by concrete strongholds with walls of concrete two yards thick. Our gun-fire wrecked all the ground about them and toppled over a few of these places, but left a number untouched, and that was the cause of the trouble. Each one had to be taken by a separate action led by our young platoon commanders, and it was a costly series of small engagements—costly to officers, especially, as always happens at such times. These young subalterns of ours handled their men not only gallantly, but skilfully, and the men followed their lead with cunning as well as pluck, and got round the concrete works by rifle-fire and bombing until they could rush them at close quarters. In this way two strongly held farms were taken, while from the right the Lancashire men were swept by enfilade fire from a third farm until its garrison was routed out and 160 of them captured. There was hard fighting farther on for a line of trenches where some of the wire was still uncut, with machine-gun fire rattling from the left flank.

But the fiercest fighting came after that against another series of those concrete forts, among them the Pommern Redoubt, where separate actions had again to be made by little groups of men under platoon commanders. The enemy's machine-gunners served their weapons to the last. In this ground, too were five batteries of German field-guns, who fired

upon our men until they were within 500 yards. The gunners had to be shot down, and our men streamed past the guns in perfect order just as they had rehearsed the attack beforehand, sending back reports, carrying through the whole operation as though on a field-day behind the lines. Yet by that time their strength had been ebbing away, and many of them had fallen. They reached the extreme limit of their advance with outposts at two more fortified farms—Wurst and Aviatik Farms—from which two days later a delayed report came back from the last remaining officer of the party that he had reached this high ground in front of Wurst Farm, and that his battalion was badly depleted. That was an heroic little message, but a few hours later that ground was no longer in our hands. The troops of the 39th Division on the left of the Lancashire men had found some trouble with uncut wire, and the enemy developed a strong counter-attack from the north, taking advantage of that exposed flank. They prepared for attack by a heavy artillery barrage, controlled by low-flying aeroplanes and co-operating with the infantry. At the same time another counter-attack came down from the high ground on the right to strike between the Lancashire men of the 55th Division and the Scottish troops of the 15th on their right. It was decided to withdraw to a better defensive line, and 160 Lancashire Fusiliers got into Schuler Farm, and held it against heavy odds in order to cover this movement. They stayed there, using machine-guns and rifles until only thirty of them were left standing, and all around them were dead and dying. Their work was done, for they had held out long enough to protect the withdrawing lines, and the thirty survivors decided to fight their way back through an enemy fast closing in upon them. So they left the farm, and of the thirty ten reached the new line. Since then the enemy has made repeated attacks from the high ground on the right, and especially against the Pommern Redoubt, but every time he has been cut up by the fire of our guns and rifles. I hear that this afternoon he is again massing for another attempt, according to the orders given to the German troops that they must get back all the ground they have lost, and at all costs, by August 3, which is to-day.

I have already told in a general way in previous dispatches how the Scots of the 15th Division farther south than the

Lancashire men fought their way up to the Frezenberg Redoubt, coming under a blast of machine-gun fire from a neighbouring farm until they captured its garrison, and then going on to two other enemy redoubts. They had the same trouble as the Lancashire men with these concrete forts, but attacked them with stubborn courage, and put them out of action. One of my good friends was wounded in front of one of these emplacements in command of his battalion of 8/10th Gordons, and it was by an odd chance that I saw him as he lay wounded in a casualty clearing-station a few hours later. "I hear my men have done well," he said. They did as well as they have always done in many great battles, and not only well, but wonderfully, and they went as far as they were allowed to go, and held on in their old grim way when things were at their worst. The whole line of the Scottish troops below the Langemarck—Zonnebeke road was attacked at two in the afternoon, or thereabouts, and their advanced line gradually withdrew under a fierce fire. At six o'clock the enemy slightly penetrated the advance line, driving the Gordons back a hundred yards, but the Camerons drove them out and away. This was on a front to the east of St.-Julien and south of Zonnebeke.

The general position remains the same. The weather remains the same, and the mud and the discomfort of men living under incessant rain and abominable shell-fire do not decrease; nevertheless, they have smashed up attack after attack, and their spirit is unbreakable. The enemy is suffering from the same evil conditions, and his only advantage is that perhaps he has better cover in which to assemble his men, and that, owing to his defeat, he is nearer to his base, so that they have not so far to tramp through the swamps in order to get up supplies of food for guns and men. As usual, we have behind us a wide stretch of shell-broken ground, which, in foul weather like this, becomes a slough.

AUGUST 5

FOR the first time for four days and nights the rain has stopped, and there is even a pale gleam of sunshine, though the sky is still heavy with rain-clouds. Oh, foul weather! What a curse it has been to our men! But the guns have never ceased their fire because of the rain and the mist, and all last night again and to-day there has been tremendous gunning

Our gunners have been working at high tension for several weeks, and the admiration of the infantry goes out to these men who, though they do not go over the top, are under heavy fire from German counter-battery work and bombed by German aeroplanes and strained by the enormous responsibility of protecting the infantry and keeping up barrage-fire without rest. In this battle the gunners have done marvellously, to the very limit of human endurance. As for the infantry, words are not good enough to describe the grit of them all. Apart from all the inevitable beastliness of battle, they have had to fight in this filthy weather, and it has made it a thousand times worse. In August men don't expect to get drowned in shell-holes, nor to get stuck to the armpits in mud before they reach the first German line. It was not as bad as that everywhere, but exactly that in parts of the line even before the heavy rains came on. The men of the 8th and 30th Divisions who attacked over ground like this east of Zillebeke went through abominable adventures. It was almost pitch-dark when they went forward, and the first thing that happened was that battalions became hopelessly mixed because of the darkness and the nature of the ground; and the second thing that the barrage went ahead of them so that they had to struggle behind in the morass unsupported by its fire, and shot at by Germans on their flanks.

Two lines of trenches known to our men as Jackdaw Support and Jackdaw Reserve were captured without much difficulty as far as the enemy was concerned, about eighty prisoners being taken in them, but with enormous difficulty on account of the boggy ground. Imagine these men, loaded up with packs and rifles and sand-bags and shovels, slipping and falling among the shell-pits, which were full of mud, water, and wire. Fellows stopped to pull out their comrades and were dragged in after them. It took them three-quarters of an hour to get over two lines of undefended trenches, whole platoons getting bogged in them and slipping back when they tried to climb out. It was a trying time for the officers who saw the barrage of our guns getting away ahead. Beyond them was high ground, from which German machine-gun and rifle fire swept them, and not far away German snipers potted our men, and especially our officers, as they climbed in and out of shell-craters. Two officers of the Manchesters had been killed by one of these

fellows when a private crept out alone on his flank, stole round him very quietly, pounced and killed him. It took two and a half hours to get to Jackdaw Reserve Trench in Sanctuary Wood, and the enemy's riflemen who had been firing at close range then ran back, or as our men say, "hopped it." The Menin road from Ypres runs through the high ground just here, and it was about here that the hardest time came for the 30th Division, because of the fierce machine-gun fire. It was here, also, that many gallant deeds were done by men who had lost their officers, and by the officers who had lost their men but collected stragglers and groups from mixed units to get on with the attack. A young private soldier of a machine-gun company advanced with his Lewis gun and by rapid fire put a German machine-gun out of action, so that a bombing party could get on. A lance-corporal of the Manchesters rallied up stragglers, organized groups, and rushed some of the German strong points. A captain behaved throughout the battle with the most fearless gallantry, and when his men wavered and fell back before the blast of machine-gun bullets that drove across the Menin road, rallied them and gathered up lads from other units, and captured two strong points with these storming parties. He was wounded in this action, but paid no heed to that, and continued to lead his men. It was here that the great tunnel ran across the Menin road, from which forty-one Germans were taken. To the right of the road this side of Inverness Copse and the Dumbarton Lakes stood Stirling Castle on the high ground of a semi-circular ridge surrounded by deep shell-pits. The "castle" itself was just a heap of broken bricks on this commanding ground, and behind those bricks were German machine-gunners, who served their weapons until our men were close to them. Then they "hopped it" again, but stayed on the other side of the ridge, firing at any men who showed themselves over the crest. Our men fought round the castle for hours, heavily shelled as soon as the enemy's gunners knew it was in our hands, and meeting counter-attacks which developed later.

A thousand and more acts of courage were done in those hours by men who knew that their comrades' lives and their own depended upon "getting on with the job," as they call it. It was necessary to get reports back to brigade headquarters at all costs, so that supplies and supports might be sent up,

and to get into touch with battalion and company commanders from the advanced line. It was not easy either to write or to send down these messages. Wires were cut and runners killed. But it had to be done. A company sergeant-major, though lightly wounded first and then badly wounded after leading his men up under a sweep of machine-gun bullets, sat down in the mud and scribbled out his report. There was a young Irish private in these Manchesters who did wonderful work as a runner with these messages. He volunteered whenever there was a dangerous bit of work to do, exposing himself over and over again, and gathering up stragglers to fill up gaps in the line of defence. A sergeant acted as runner when two of his own had been killed, and got through under intense fire. And one of these runners had a great adventure all to himself on his journey under fire. This young private was going up with a message when he saw something move outside a dug-out. He went forward cautiously, and saw a German soldier disappear into the dark entry. The Manchester lad was all alone, but he followed the German into the hole, down a flight of mud stairs and into an underground cave. He stood face to face with eighteen men. One of them was a non-commissioned officer. They stared back at him with brooding eyes, as though wondering whether they should kill him. He shouted at them, "Now, then, come out, and look sharp about it," and made a sign to the door. They put their hands up and said, "Kamerad." "Well, then, get out," said the boy. They filed out past him, and he waited till the last had gone. Then he went up the mud stairs to open ground again, and saw that the eighteen men had scattered, finding that he was all alone. He shouted to them and fired his rifle over their heads, so that they thought twice of escape, and then came back to him meekly. So he formed them up, and marched behind them down to the prisoners' cage, where he took his receipt for eighteen prisoners.

There was now great shelling, and the enemy was massing for a counter-attack. Through this fire a young Irish officer in the machine-gun section brought up nine out of his twelve guns in order to meet the attack, and without that great courage of his the position would have been very bad. A sergeant of machine-gunners stood in a bit of a trench with his team when a shell burst, killing two men and wounding others. He stood there, splashed with blood and in great danger of death, without

losing his nerve or his spirit, and after helping the wounded he "carried on" and kept his guns in action.

Meanwhile, down at brigade headquarters the situation was very obscure; so obscure that the brigadier sent up a young captain, his brigade major, to find out the situation and report on it. Not a safe and easy job to do at such a time; but this officer, whom I met to-day, went up to Stirling Castle, where he found mixed units still under heavy machine-gun fire, and only one or two officers without knowledge of the general situation owing to the difficulty of getting communications. The brigade major reorganized the situation with a cool head and a fine courage, collected parties of mixed riflemen, and took them to the high ground, where there was a good field of fire, and then, with his orderly, moved across the Menin road, which was at that time unprotected. He organized the support of this, and on the way came across the entrance to the tunnel under the road. He stopped and listened. It seemed to him that he could hear movements and voices. He went into the tunnel, and heard and saw a German there. He covered him with a revolver, and the man put his hands up. But the German was not alone. There was a shuffling of feet farther down, and the German said, "There are four of us farther in the tunnel." The brigade major went farther down, with his revolver ready, and met the four men and told them in French and English that he would kill them if they moved a step. They surrendered, two of them speaking good English, and the brigade major's orderly took one of their rifles, not being armed himself, and with that weapon escorted them back. They were men of the 238th Regiment, and had only been in that line twenty-four hours. It was the brigade major's report that cleared up the situation from his headquarters and made it more easy of control.

Some Scottish troops who fought alongside the Manchesters at Stirling Castle behaved with equal valour. They endured long and intense shelling, while through the murk and smoke enemy aeroplanes flew very low, firing their machine-guns at the troops, batteries, and mule convoys, with a good imitation of our own air pilots. What I have told so far covers only a small section of the Front, but I have now given a broad picture of all the length of battle, and these episodes I have just described will give a closer idea of the way in which all

our soldiers have been fighting in this country around Ypres, and of all they have suffered in the foulest weather I have ever seen in summer.

AUGUST 4

THE Tanks have justified themselves again, and won their spurs—spurs as big as gridirons—in the battle of Flanders. They had plenty of chance to show what they could do.

As I described yesterday, the way of our advance was hindered by a number of little concrete forts built in the ruin of farmsteads which had withstood our gun-fire. At Plum Farm and Apple Villa, and in stronger, more elaborate, fortified points, like the Frezenberg and Pommern Castle and Pommern Redoubt, the enemy's machine-gunners held out when everything about them was chaos and death, and played a barrage of bullets on our advancing men. Platoons and half-platoons attacked them in detail at a great cost of life, and it was in such places that the Tanks were of most advantage. It was at Pommern Castle, east of St.-Julien, that one of the Tanks did best. Don't imagine the castle as a kind of Windsor, with big walls and portcullis and high turrets, but as slabs of concrete in a huddle of sand-bags above a nest of deep dug-outs. On the other side of it was Pommern Redoubt, the same in style of defence. Our men were fighting hard for the castle, and having a bad time under its fire. The Tank came to help them, and advanced under a swish of bullets to the German emplacement, lurching up the piled bags over the heaped-up earth, and squatting on top like a grotesque creature playing the old game of "I'm the King of the Castle; get down, you dirty rascals." The dirty rascals, who were German soldiers, unshaven and covered in wet mud, did not like the look of their visitor, which was firing with great ferocity. They fled to the cover of Pommern Redoubt beyond. Then the Tank moved back to let the infantry get on, but as soon as it had turned its back the Germans, with renewed pluck, took possession of the castle again. The men who were fighting round about again gave a signal to the Tank to get busy. So it came back, and with the infantry on its flanks made another assault, so that the enemy fled again. Pommern Redoubt was attacked in the same way with good help from the Tank.

The Frezenberg Redoubt was another place where the Tanks were helpful, and they did good work at Westhoek, the remnant

of a village to the right of that. One of them attacked and helped to capture a strong point west of St.-Julien, from which a good many Germans came out to surrender, and afterwards some Tanks went through the village, but had to get out again in a hurry to escape capture in the German counter-attacks. It was not easy to get back in a hurry, as by that hour in the afternoon the rain had turned the ground to swamp, and the Tanks sank deep in it, with wet mud half-way up their flanks, and slipped and slithered back when they tried to struggle out. Many of the officers and crews had to get out of their steel forts, risking heavy shelling and machine-gun fire to dig out their way, and in the neighbourhood of St.-Julien they worked for two hours in the open to de-bog their Tank while German gunners tried to destroy them by direct hits. In a farm somewhere in this neighbourhood no fewer than sixty Germans came out with their hands up in surrender as soon as the Tank was at close quarters, and a story is told, though I haven't the exact details, that in another place the mere threat of a Tank's approach was enough to decide a party of eight to give in. It is certain beyond all doubt that the enemy's infantry has a great fear of these machines, and does not see any kind of humour in them. In this battle there is not a single case of an attack upon a Tank by infantry, though we know that they have been given special training behind their lines with dummy Tanks according to definite rules laid down by the German Command.

One fight did take place with a Tank, and it is surely the most fantastic duel that has ever happened in war. It was queer enough, as I described a day or two ago, when one of our airmen flew over a motor-car, and engaged in a revolver duel with a German officer, but even that strange picture is less weird than when a German aeroplane flew low over a Tank, and tried to put out its eyes by bursts of machine-gun bullets. Imagine the scene—that muddy monster crawling through the slime, with sharp stabs of fire coming from its flanks, and above an engine, with wings, swooping round and about it like an angry albatross, and spattering its armour with bullets. It was an unequal fight, for the Tank just ignored that waspish machine-gun fire, and went on its way with only a scratch or two. The Tanks were in action around the marshes and woodlands by Shrewsbury Forest. Here, as

I have already said, there was very severe infantry fighting, in which the Leicesters, Northamptons, and above all the Middlesex Regiment had desperate engagements, and the enemy made many counter-attacks, so that the progress of our men was slow and difficult. The Tanks helped them as best they could.

So goes the tale of the Tanks on the first day of the battle of Flanders. It will be seen from what I have written that they gave good help to the troops. The pilots and crews behaved with splendid gallantry, and not only took great risks, but endured to the last extremity of fatigue in that narrow, hot space where they work their engines and their guns.

V

THE SONG OF THE COCKCHAFERS

AUGUST 8

ONE of the most bitter blows to Germany, if she has heard the news, must be the destruction of the famous regiment of "Maikaefer," or Cockchafers, by our Welsh troops. The Kaiser called them his brave Coburgers. In Germany the very children sang in the streets about them. And proud of their own exploits, they had their own soldier poets who wrote songs about the regiment, to which they marched through Belgium and France and Galicia. I saw one of these songs yesterday, picked up on the battlefield near Pilkem. It was written by one Paul Zimmermann of theirs, and was printed in a leaflet sold at ten pfennigs (a penny). It tells how the Cockchafers come out in the spring and how the children sing when they come. They are ready for battle then, wherever it may be. The call comes for them wherever there is the hardest fighting, so the Cockchafers swarmed through Belgium, and taught the French a lesson, and pressed after the wicked English, who—so the lying legend goes—used dumdum bullets, and swept back the Russians through Galicia. Old Hindenburg calls for them every time when there are brave deeds to be done. I have copied out two verses for those who read German:

Der Mai der bringt uns Sonnenschein,
Er bringt uns Bluhtenpracht;

Der Mai der bringt uns Kaeferlein
Viel tausend büer Nacht;
Und von der Kinderlippen klingts:
"Maikaefer, fliege, flieg."
Und durich den Frühlinges jubel dringts:
"Dein Vater ist im Krieg."

Uns Garde Fusiliere nennt
Maikaefer jeder Mund,
Weil unser stolzes Regiment
Im Mai stets fertig stand.

Well, old Hindenburg will call in vain now for his Cockchafers, the Guard Fusilier Regiment of the 3rd Guards Division, for nearly six hundred of them are in our hands and others lie dead upon the ground near Pilkem. They had relieved the 100th Infantry Reserve Regiment on the night of July 29, and lay three battalions deep in their trench systems across the Yser Canal north-east of Boesinghe, scattered thinly in the shell-craters which were all that was left of the trenches in the front lines, more densely massed in the support lines, and defending a number of concrete emplacements and dug-outs behind. The 9th Grenadier Regiment and a battalion of the Lehr Regiment reinforced the Cockchafers and lay out in the open behind the Langemarck—Gheluvelt line, and in the support lines a battalion of the Lehr of the 3rd Guards Division had already relieved a regiment of the 392nd Infantry Reserve Regiment. Some sections of the 3rd Battalion of the 9th Grenadier Regiment had been sent forward from Langemarck to act as sniping posts, and two special machine-gun detachments were also pushed up to check our assault. They were enough to defend this part of the Pilkem Ridge, and the ground itself was in their favour as our men lay in the hollow with their backs to the Yser Canal, across which all their supports and supplies had to pass.

What was in the favour of the Welsh was that they knew the ground in front of them in every detail from air photographs and from night and day raids, having lived in front of it for several months, digging and tunnelling so as to get cover from ceaseless fire, and storing up a great desire to get even with the enemy for all they had suffered. They had suffered great hardships and great perils, intensified before the battle because of violent shelling by high explosives and gas-shells, so that

when the hour for attack came they had been hard tried already. It made no difference to the pace and order of their assault. Our bombardment had been overwhelming, and the heavy barrage which signalled the assault was, according to all these Welshmen, perfect. They followed it very closely, so closely that they were on and over the Cockchafers before they could organize any kind of defence. Many of the enemy's machine-guns had been smashed and buried. Those still intact were never brought into action, as their gunners had no time to get out of the concrete shelters in which they were huddled to escape from the annihilating fire.

It was in these places that most of the prisoners were taken —there and in a big trench, ten feet wide and twelve deep, on the outskirts of Pilkem village, where there is no village at all. The Cockchafers came out dazed, and gave themselves up mostly without a show of fighting. In some of their concrete shelters, like those at Mackensen Farm—don't imagine any buildings there—and Gallwitz Farm and Boche House and Zouave House, there were stores of ammunition, with many shells and trench-mortars.

So the Welsh went on in waves, sending back the prisoners on their way, through Pilkem to the high ground by the iron cross beyond, and then down the slopes to the Steenbeek stream. On the left were the Royal Welsh Fusiliers, who took the ground of Pilkem itself. On the right were men of the Welsh Regiment. In the ground beyond Pilkem they found the regimental headquarters in finely built dug-outs, but the staff had fled to save their skins. There was another big dug-out near by used by the enemy as a dressing-station. It had room enough for a hundred men. There were fifty men. The Welsh swarmed round it—thirty wounded and twenty un-wounded Germans. The doctor in charge was a good fellow, and, after surrendering his own men, attended to some of the wounded Welsh. Two machine-guns and sixteen prisoners were taken out of a place called Jolie Farm, and thirty prisoners out of Rudolf Farm—concrete kennels in a chaos of craters—and three officers and forty-seven men came out of the ruins of a house somewhere near the Iron Cross. All the Welsh troops behaved with great courage, and a special word is due to the runners, who carried messages back under fire, and to the stretcher-bearers, who rescued the wounded utterly regard-

less of their own risks. Afterwards the mule drivers and leaders were splendid, bringing up supplies under heavy barrage fire. Wales did well that day, and the Welsh miners, who had already proved themselves as great diggers and great tunnellers and very brave men, showed themselves cool and fearless in the assault.

AUGUST 6

I AM now able to mention more of the troops whose adventures I have described in previous dispatches, in addition to the Guards and the Welsh, who in a great assault, hardly checked by the enemy, captured the heights of Pilkem and went down the slopes beyond to the Steenbeek stream.

The Manchesters, with Royal Scots, Royal Irish Rifles, and Durham Light Infantry of the 8th Division, were amongst those who attacked Stirling Castle below Inverness Copse, as I narrated in full detail yesterday, with the incident of the runner who captured eighteen prisoners in a dug-out and of the young brigade major who reorganized the position and found five Germans in the great tunnel under the Menin road.

As I have already said, it was the men of Lancashire with battalions of the Liverpool Regiment of the 55th Division who went up from Wieltje against the concrete forts, where they fought in many independent little actions under platoon commanders, who shot down the gunners of five German batteries, and went forward as though on the drill-ground, in spite of heavy losses and great fire, to Wurst Farm and the high ground below the Gravenstafel, until they were forced to fall back somewhat under a heavy German counter-attack, when 160 men covered the withdrawal, and ten alone got back.

Farther south, they were Scots of the 15th Division who attacked the Frezenberg—Gordons and Camerons among them—and farther south still on their right were Sherwood Foresters and others of the 39th Division, who had some of the hardest fighting of the day, up through Hooge, that place of old ill-fame, round Bellewaerde Lake and across the Menin road to the Westhoek Ridge.

It was these Scots and these English who bore the brunt of the great German counter-attack on the afternoon of August 1. After fighting their way forward past the pill-box emplacements or concrete redoubts with a stiff and separate fight at the ruin of an estaminet on the cross-roads at Westhoek, where a

sergeant and ten or twelve men captured forty of the enemy, the Sherwood Foresters and their comrades took "cover" during the night, exposed to fierce shell-fire and drenched in the rain, now falling steadily, and filling the shell-craters with mud and water, so that men were up to their waist in them. It was at about 2.30 on the following afternoon that the enemy developed his counter-attack from the direction of Bremen Redoubt and the high ground beyond our line, taking advantage of the mist to assemble and get forward. It was the critical hour of the battle.

The enemy's attack was preceded by a heavy artillery barrage, and by an incessant and wide-stretching blast of machine-gun fire. His assaulting troops drove first at the Midland men south of the Roulers railway, and the Sherwoods and Northamptons tried to hold their line by rifle-fire, Lewis-gun fire, and bombs. When officers fell wounded the non-commissioned officers and men carried on and fought a soldiers' battle. One Lewis-gunner drove the enemy back from a gap in the lines and others held back the enemy's storm troops long enough to give their comrades time to get into good order as far as was possible in a fight of this kind. The Germans forced their way forward among the shell-craters and ruins hoping to surround the Sherwoods and the men of Nottingham and Derby, who were steadily firing and fighting, so that the enemy's losses were not light. Meanwhile the Scots of the 15th Division on the left were meeting the attack and found their flank exposed owing to these happenings on their right. It became more and more exposed as the attack proceeded, and just before three o'clock the Gordons, who were in this perilous position, had to swing back. This movement uncovered the battalion headquarters, where one of the officers, acting as adjutant, had turned out his staff, which fought to defend the position. He then gathered all the Gordons in his neighbourhood and held on to the station buildings. Meantime the left of the Gordons had been swung back to form a defensive flank, and with two Vickers guns they swept the rear lines of the storm troops with deadly fire. The enemy fell in great numbers, but other waves came on and nearly reached the top of the crest upon which our men had formed their line. There a young officer of the Gordons seized the critical moment of the battle and by his rapid action proved himself a great soldier.

With some of the Camerons he led his men forward down the slopes towards the advancing enemy, each man firing with his rifle as he advanced, making gaps in the German wave. The enemy stood up to this for a minute or two, but when the Highlanders were within fifty yards of them they broke and ran. As they fled our gunners, who had not seen the first S O S signals owing to the mist, came into action and inflicted great losses upon the retreating men. But the day was saved by the action of the Scottish infantry, who had learned the use of the rifle in open warfare, and who had been trained for this kind of action in small groups, acting largely on individual initiative. Many of the enemy were surrounded by fire, and one officer and seven men gained our line in safety, while the others were caught in a death-trap. There were moments when, but for the courage and discipline of our troops, the enemy's counter-attack had a great chance of success, and the history of this battle might have been less victorious for us.

VI

WOODS OF ILL-FAME

AUGUST 12

THERE was violent fighting yesterday. After our successful advance at dawn across the Westhoek Ridge, when more than 200 prisoners were taken, the right of our attack in Glencorse Wood, or Schloss Park as the Germans call it, and among the tree-stumps which were once woods south of that, was heavily engaged with an enemy concealed in the usual concrete emplacements, and defending himself with well-placed machine-guns.

Among our troops who had the hardest struggle were the Irish Rifles, Cheshires, Lancashire Fusiliers, North Lancashires, and Worcestershires of the 25th Division against Glencorse Wood, and the Bedfords and Queen's of the 18th Division against Inverness Copse.

As on the ridge, the infantry came to close quarters and fought with bombs and rifles and bayonets, but it was mainly gun-fire again which decided the issues of the day and caused most losses on both sides. As I have said many times, since the battle of July 31 the enemy has massed a great power of artillery against us, and has apparently no immediate lack of

ammunition. For miles the horizon was seething with the smoke of heavy shells. The enemy's barrage-fire was great. Ours was greater. Between Glencorse Wood and Inverness Copse, and all about Stirling Castle and the Frezenberg, he made a hell of fire, and many of our men had to pass through its fury, and not all passed or came back again. But afterwards the enemy's turn came, and masses of his men, thick waves of them, sent forward with orders to counter-attack, were caught under the fire of our guns and smashed to pieces.

The enemy attempted five separate counter-attacks yesterday, and in spite of all his losses renewed his efforts this morning with great determination, so that, after the exhaustion and ordeal of the night under continual fire, our men were compelled to give way in Glencorse Wood. That was necessary, because farther south the enemy had held their ground, and the copse was a salient exposed to harassing fire from large numbers of guns in the neighbourhood of Polygon Wood and the country east. It is a favourite device of the enemy to withdraw his guns on to the flanks of our advance, as soon as we have penetrated his lines, in order to check further progress, and he did this as soon as the battle of July 31 was fought, though he had to leave many of his field-guns in the mud of No Man's Land, where they still lie.

This method of defence did not ensure the success of his counter-attacks, though it had made the progress of our men hard south of Glencorse Wood. It was at about midday yesterday that our troops, who had made good their ground along Westhoek Ridge, had to call for further help from the guns. At the same time aeroplanes, taking advantage of wonderful visibility after the rains, were above the German lines, and saw a great gathering of German troops in Nuns' Wood and Polygon Wood. The calls were answered by large groups of batteries over a stretch of country miles deep. The heavies, far behind the lines, answered with 15-inch and 12-inch shells. The 9·2's heard the call in the quiet fields, where wild flowers grow over old shell-holes. Their 8-inch brothers heard the call and came quick into action. Six-inch and 4·2's made reply, and from them broke out one great salvo, followed by long rolls of drum-fire. Among the shell-craters of Nuns' Wood there were hundreds of men lined up for attack. They had their rifles at the slope, and they were hung round with

bombs and trench-spades and cloth bags with iron rations, and they began to move forward just as that bombardment opened upon them. All the shell-fire burst over them and into them. They were swept by it. They were killed in heaps. Afterwards one of our airmen flew low over that stricken wood where they had been, and he came back with his report. Never before, he said, had he seen so many dead men. The German soldiers were lying there in great numbers. Other attempts were made to get forward, but it was only on the right, where there was close fighting, that the enemy made any progress.

At about six in the evening there was another call on our gunners, and this time the report came that the enemy was assembling in the valley of the Hanebeek. Two battalions of them were able to advance into the open towards our lines before our guns found their target. Then they flung themselves down under this new storm of fire or tried to escape from it by running or plunging into shell-craters. There were not many who escaped.

One of them who became a prisoner in our hands said that two battalions were annihilated—he used the phrase "wiped out." Perhaps that was an exaggeration. There are always some men who slip through, but in this case whole ranks of men were blown to bits.

I talked to-day with some of our own wounded who came limping through the casualty clearing-stations. They were men of the Worcesters and Bedfords and Queen's, whose battalions I have met before after battles. One of them told me how he lay out all night waiting for the attack in the dawn on Glencorse Wood and Inverness Copse. There are only tree-stumps there in the great white stretch of shell-craters, and the enemy was holding the place lightly with machine-guns in those pits that had been made by our fire. Our men were upon them quick after the barrage, and they were routed out of their holes before they had time to put up a strong defence. By bad luck, as sometimes happens, owing to the eagerness of our men to cover as much ground as possible, the Irish Rifles and the North Lancashires of the 25th Division went at least 200 yards beyond their goal, and were caught in our barrage, which was preventing supports coming up to the enemy. As soon as they realized their deadly error they fell back again, carrying their wounded.

LATER

THERE was sharp hand-to-hand fighting on the Westhoek Ridge by the Lancashire Fusiliers, North Lancashires, and Cheshires. Both sides at last came into the open, the enemy standing about his concrete houses as our men advanced upon them, and using machine-guns and rifles. Most of these Germans were men of the 54th Reserve Division, and bold fellows who did not surrender so easily as I first imagined, in spite of the intense and prolonged barrage that had swept over them and wrecked their ground. In a strong point at the south end of the ridge, one of those concrete blockhouses which shelter machine-guns, they held out for three hours, and it was only taken when it had been battered by trench-mortars brought up into action at close range by some gallant men of ours, and when it was rushed from the flanks while the ground was still being swept by bullets. After that the ridge was ours on its forward slopes, at the northern end dropping below the western slopes southwards.

In Glencorse Wood the Lancashire men were enfiladed by machine-guns when a large part of the wood was no longer in our hands. It is on high ground, and with other slopes beyond, like those of Nuns' Wood and Polygon Wood, forms the barrier guarding the vital centres of the German position in the north, so that he fights to hold it with the full weight of his power in men and guns. Both are powerful, and his fire on Friday and Saturday was the fiercest ever faced by men who have fought through the Somme and later battles.

But his counter-attacks have failed against our Westhoek positions, and everything I have heard shows that his battalions, above all the 27th Regiment, were massacred by our artillery. Those Germans did not all die by shell-fire. The Lancashire Fusiliers and the North Lancashires fired their rifles all through Friday and Saturday at human targets they could not fail to hit. German reserves hurried up to relieve the shattered battalions and flung straight into the counter-attacks, wandered about in the open, ignorant of our men's whereabouts, like lost sheep. They were in full field kit, and as they came into the open our men shot at them with deadly effect. The first sign of the first great counter-attack on Friday was when seventy men or so came forward on the left and tried to rush an old German gun-emplacement. They were seen by the Lancashire

Fusiliers, and the commanding officer, believing that an attack was imminent, sent through the call for the guns which led to the bombardment I have described in my earlier message.

We also opened a widespread barrage of machine-gun fire, and this caused heavy slaughter. All the country was aflame throughout the afternoon of Friday, and it was before the attack, at 6.40 in the evening, that the enemy's artillery concentrated in full and frightful fury. This artillery-fire has never ceased since then, though slackening down a little from time to time, and to-day it was in full blast again. It is a day of wonderful light, so that every tree and house and field of standing corn is seen for miles from any height in a stereoscopic panorama below a fleecy sky with long blue reaches between the cloud mountains. There was a lot of air fighting this morning because of this light across the landscape, and wherever I motored to-day there was the loud drone of the flying engines, and little fat bursts of shrapnel trying to catch German planes who came over on bombing adventures above our camps and villages. The enemy is all out, and it seems to me likely that he wishes to make this battle a decisive one of the war. I do not see how he can hope to decide it in his own favour after the loss of the Pilkem and Westhoek Ridges, but he is out to kill regardless of his own losses.

VII

THE BATTLE OF LANGEMARCK

AUGUST 16

THIS morning our troops made a general advance beyond the line of our recent attacks and gained about 1500 yards of ground on a wide front, which includes the village of Langemarck, and goes southward in the region of Glencorse Copse and Polygon Wood. From north to south the divisions engaged were the 29th, 20th, 11th, 48th, 36th (Ulster), 16th (Irish), 8th, and 56th.

On the left of our troops the French went forward also, and struck out into the swampy neck of ground which they call the Peninsula or Presqu'ile, surrounded on three sides by deep floods. On the right of our attack the fighting has been most violent, and the enemy has made strong and repeated counter-attacks

over all the high ground which drops down to Glencorse Wood from the Nuns' Wood to the Hanebeek. His losses have been high, for although the weather is still stormy, making the ground bad for our men, there is light for our flying men and artillery observers, and at various parts of the Front his assembly of troops has been signalled quickly, so that our guns have smashed up his formations and caused great slaughter.

The Germans used to call the battles of the Somme the "blood-bath." Their diaries and their letters revealed the horror they had of the shambles into which they were driven. In the early days of this year they made a strategic retreat, under the guidance of Hindenburg, with the one object of escaping from our intense artillery-fire, but their methods of defence have been entirely changed by holding the front lines lightly by weak troops and scattered machine-gun emplacements, and concentrating their best troops behind for counter-attacks, in order to save man-power and lessen the tide of casualties. It is a sound system of defence, but it is the policy of an army fighting a retreat and giving up ground at the highest possible cost, never getting back by counter-attack to quite the same line over which the enemy had flowed. As a life-saving policy, however, the success has not been great, for it is certain that the German troops are suffering hideously from our shell-fire, and their counter-attacks have been costly in blood.

I suppose these words of mine convey nothing to people who read them. How could they when for three years we have been talking in superlatives without exaggerating the facts, but without understanding them, as minds are numbed by colossal figures? But out here, seeing the flame of shell-fire night after night stretching away round a great horizon, and hearing from near and from afar the ceaseless hammer-strokes of great guns, and watching the starlit sky, as I watched it last night from quiet cornfields, all red and restless with winking lights leaping up in tongues and spreading lengthwise in a sullen glare, one does realize a little the monstrous scale of all this and the destruction that is being done among the masses of men in the dark and in the hiding-places of the woods and trenches.

Experts are wrangling over the numbers of the German reserves. Fantastic figures are given of the millions of Germans still under arms. Well, there is no exact data, and all we know

with any certainty is that the enemy is still outwardly strong—strong at least in defence. But the magnitude of his losses during three years is revealed by the fact of to-day's fighting and the place in which it happened. It was in the autumn of 1914, during the first battle of Ypres, that the Germans attacked our Third Brigade at Langemarck, where our English troops made a great and victorious assault to-day. Three years ago they were the German lads of the 1914 class who marched up to our lines, linked arm in arm to be mowed down by the most deadly rifle-fire in the world, because those men of our old Army were the finest marksmen. Yesterday at Lens, or rather at Hill 70, there were boys of the 1919 class who helped to hold the German lines, and that fact is one great tragedy of German hopes and the great proof of her defeat.

Last night our English troops who were going to attack the village of Langemarck, the old ghost-village which has been wiped out of all but history, went across the Steenbeek stream and lay there waiting for the hour of their assault. They were all light-infantry men, the King's, the Duke of Cornwall's, Somerset, the "Koylies" (King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry), the King's Royal Rifles, and the Rifle Brigade of the 20th Division.

As we know now from captured orders a German regiment was ordered to attack our lines at 3.45 this morning. Only forty men of that regiment were seen advancing and they were annihilated. Our men went forward when there was light enough. Immediately on their right, in front of them, was the ruin of an old estaminet called Au Bon Gîte, made into a fortified emplacement and defended by machine-guns. It was a nasty place, and our men avoided it, and swept both sides of it and beyond, so that its garrison of gunners had to surrender. Keeping a steady line as much as possible over bad ground, they went forward, leaving the waves that followed them to deal with batches of prisoners who had been left alive after our bombardment of the night, and made their way toward Langemarck. Here they were in real trouble, but not from the enemy. It was the state of the ground that threatened them with the worst disaster. All round Langemarck the floods were out, and the heavy rains of the week had filled old shell-holes to the brim and made a bog everywhere. Men sank up to their waists as in the worst days of the fighting during the winter on the

Somme. It was not water but wet mud that made their cold bath, and they had to use their rifles to keep themselves from sinking deep, and men on little islands of more solid ground had to haul out their comrades. All this meant loss of time, so that our barrage would sweep ahead of them and the German gunners would be able to do dirty work.

On the left of Langemarck the men were delayed by these bogs. On the right they were able to push up with great difficulty, but still to get on and work up to the village. The enemy ran as soon as they saw that our men were near. There were some spasmodic bursts of machine-gun fire, but the defence was feeble, and here, anyhow, the enemy had been demoralized by our frightful gun-fire.

A regimental commander, a full colonel, was taken here, and that is a rare bird to catch, as in most cases German officers of that rank are well behind the line. He was dejected and nerve-shaken, and spoke freely of the great losses of his men. They were men of the 79th Reserve Division who had been holding Langemarck, and they have suffered most severely, having lost large numbers of men in the previous attacks. Other prisoners came from the 214th Division, holding the line north of the Staden Railway—the railway to the ground above Bixschoote. The regiment which perhaps suffered worst of all was a battalion of the 262nd, which was broken to pieces in the British attack across the Steenbeek.

To the right of the attack on Langemarck our light-infantry men were successful, and in spite of concrete blockhouses and some deadly machine-gunning, won all the ground they had been asked to get. The men report that they saw large numbers of German dead, and that little groups of men fled before them as they advanced. Later in the morning the enemy rallied, and came back in counter-attacks, one of which seems to have come within ten yards of our men before it withered away under rifle and machine-gun fire.

It was on the right centre of the attack that, as I have said, the fighting was most uncertain. The Irish Divisions were heavily engaged here working towards Polygon Wood and the high ground thereabouts. They had to advance over frightful ground, and against the enemy in his greatest strength, because he is determined to defend these high slopes if he loses all else.

VIII

CAPTURE OF HILL SEVENTY

AUGUST 15

THIS morning, at dawn, the Canadians captured Hill 70, attacked and gained a maze of streets and trenches forming the mining colonies of St.-Laurent and St.-Emilie, and are now fighting on the outskirts of Lens. A fair number of prisoners have been taken—I saw parties of them marching down under escort an hour or two ago. Some of the enemy's troops were seen running away from the wreckage of the red houses in the suburbs of Lens as soon as Hill 70 was taken, but in some parts of the outer defences north and west of the city the garrison is fighting fiercely. The Canadians have, at any rate, gained most of the outward bastions of Lens formed by the separate colonies, or cités, as they are called, made up of blocks of miners' cottages and works united in one big mining district.

Hill 70 is ours again after two years since we took it and lost it. I don't know whether that will cause a thrill to people at home. I think it will to those whose men fought there in the September of 1915. One of my own great memories of the war is of those days in the battle of Loos, when the Scots of the 15th Division and the Londoners of the 47th, and afterwards the Guards, went through the village of Loos and gained that dirty ridge of ground among old slag-heaps under frightful shell-fire. It was gained in the first great rush of the Londoners and the Scots. The Londoners played a football up the slopes, and the Scots went up with their pipes—do you remember?—and for a few hours they had a quiet time here and collected souvenirs, until later the enemy came back in fierce counter-attacks, and the Guards and the 1st Division fell back after heroic fighting and great losses. I saw the Jocks on that first day coming back with German helmets on their heads, laughing in spite of their wounds, and for the first time I saw masses of German prisoners taken by British troops, and in the square of Béthune, through which, in driving rain, there went a steady tide of men and artillery, there was a group of German guns as trophies of victory. It seemed a great victory at first. It was only afterwards we knew how much more might have been

gained. And there was a tragic story to tell. Some of the Jocks went as far as an outlying northern suburb of Lens, but few of them ever came back again. Now to-day, after two years less a month, the Canadians have fought over the same ground, and have gone over and beyond Hill 70 and linked up many of their former gains in these mining cités on the outskirts of Lens.

In describing former fighting round Lens I said it was like a war in Wigan. The comparison is true. But to-day, when I watched the scene of the Canadian attack with heavy shell-fire over all these houses and pit-heads, I thought of another northern town which would look very much like this if the hell of war came to it. I thought of Bolton and its suburbs, Entwistle and other straggling little towns on the edge of the moors, with Doffcocker and rural villages among cornfields, and factory chimneys on the horizon, and slag-heaps beyond green fields. That will give an image to English people of the scene of war to-day, except that Lens and its suburbs were never so black as our English factory towns, and its walls are still red in spite of their shell-holes.

Before the attack began at dawn wild flights of shells passed over this little world of ruin to Hill 70, which is no hill at all, but just a low hummock of ground criss-crossed with trenches and burrowed with dug-outs and barren and filthy with relics of death, on the northern side of the city of Lens. From all the ruins around, separate villages of ruin joining up with the streets of Lens itself, red flames gushed up when our batteries fired at a hot pace, and where the shells burst there were long low flashes spreading across a sky heavy and black with storm-clouds. Over the German lines and the houses where they held the cellars the shells burst in a tumult which had a sudden beginning just before the dawn, and above all their smoke and fire there were fountains of wonderfully bright light, of burning gold and of running flame all scarlet and alive. The light was from our smoke-producing rockets, and the running flame was from drums of boiling oil which we fired into the enemy's trenches to burn him alive if we caught him there. I saw the far spread of gun-fire in the early morning after the thin crescent moon had faded, and when there was a grey, moist light over the city and fields.

Soon after the Canadians had taken Hill 70 the enemy flung back a great barrage, so that the ridge was vomiting up columns

of black smoke like scores of factory chimneys on a foggy day. And in all the suburbs of Lens, those cités of St.-Laurent and St.-Emilie and St.-Pierre, and into Liévin and Calonne, and Maroc and Grenay, he pitched heavy shells which came howling across the wilderness of bricks and slag-heaps, and broke into gruff enormous coughs out of which black demons of smoke rose like the evil genii out of the bottle, darkening the view. An hour or so later the sun came brightly through the clouds, and these cités of strife, girdled by cornfields in which the stooks are standing, and by green hills across which the tide of slaughter has swept, leaving them in peace again, were flooded with fresh, glinting light, so that the scene was rich in colour. There was not a figure to be seen on Hill 70, not a movement of life among the houses around Lens. The Canadians had gone across in the smoke, and now they were hidden among the ruins. The only life was that of shell-fire, and it has a life of its own, though it is meant for death.

A little to the left in front of me was one of the fosses which rise among the broken houses. For some reason the enemy had special spite against it, and every few minutes a great shell came with a yell and smashed about it. The German gunners were flinging their stuff about in a random way, searching for our batteries and hoping to kill collections of men. They did not have much luck, and they all but caught sixty of their own men who had just come along as prisoners, and, having escaped from the barrage-fire, hoped for safety from their own guns. One of their shells fell within twenty yards of them, but before the next one came their guards told them to quick march, and they ran hard. They were wretched-looking men, more miserable in physique than any I have seen for a long time, and sallow and pinched and gaunt. Some of them were very young, but not all, and there were none so young as those described to me by some Canadian soldiers who fought with them to-day.

"They were children," said one man, "no bigger than schoolboys. I call it cruel to send such youngsters into the fighting-line."

Another man told me that he saw boys lying dead who looked no older than fourteen, and it made him feel sick. They could not all have been like that, these men of the 155th and 156th Reserve Regiments, regiments from whom some of the prisoners come, because they are making a very stiff fight in

some parts of their defensive system, and the Canadians have real men against them. It seems that Hill 70 was held lightly and by the younger class of soldiers, the best Prussian troops being kept back to hold the inner defences of Lens, and to make counter-attacks.

"It was a walk-over," said a Canadian, describing the assault on the hill. "Our barrage was great, and it had simply smashed the ground to pulp. I thought it a worse wreck than Vimy, which was some wreck. One could just see a faint suggestion of trenches, but everything was clean swept. There were two or three machine-gun emplacements which gave us a bit of trouble, but not much. We jumped on them and wiped them out. I can't say I saw many German dead, but just a few boys. I expect the others were buried and smashed up." These Canadians were wonderful. They went into the battle with an absolute confidence. "I knew we should do the trick," said one of them, who came walking back with a wound in his thigh, "and all my pals were of the same mind."

He said one amazing thing, lying there waiting for his operation in the back parlour of a miner's cottage, in one of these mazes into which the enemy was plugging shells at times: "I enjoyed the show very much," he said, "it was a fair treat."

Next to him lay another badly wounded man with a piece of wire plucked from his own flesh wrapped up in a piece of cotton-wool as a trophy, and a hole through his leg. He grinned at me and said: "We put it across them all right. I wouldn't have missed it, but I'm sorry I got this leg messed up. I didn't come over to get a Blighty wound. I want to see the end of this war. That's what I want to do. I want to be in at the end."

The wounded men came back like that unless they came back with only the soles of their boots showing over the edge of the ambulance. Fortunately, up to midday at least, there were not many badly wounded men. The spirit of men who have fought and fought and seen the worst horrors of war, and suffered its most hideous discomforts, is one of those miracles which I do not understand. I only record the fact about these hardy Canadians and the Canadian Scottish.

Of the same character are the civilian inhabitants of one of these mining cités on the edge of the battlefields, where they have remained since the beginning of the war. Nearer even

than the edge. They live in streets where most of the houses have been hit and many of them wrecked. Death comes about and above them. Many of the people have been killed, and the children go to school in cellars with gas-masks because of the poison that comes on an east wind or a north. They were there again to-day: old women drinking early morning coffee in little rooms that have stood between masses of ruin; a widow in black weeds, like a dowager duchess, walking slowly down a street shelled last night and to-day; girls with braided hair standing at street corners, among soldiers in steel helmets, watching shells bursting a little way off, with no certainty that that is their limit.

One of these girls came along, and I saw that she had a bandaged head.

"Wounded?" I asked. She nodded and said, "Yes, a day or two ago."

"Why do you stay in such a place?" I said. "Aren't you frightened?"

She laughed. "What can one do? My mamma keeps living here, so how can I go away? Besides, one gets used to it a little."

I am bound to say I don't get used to these things, but see them always with amazement.

A Few Days Later

Lens itself is now no better than its outer suburbs, a town of battered houses without roofs and with broken walls leaning against rubbish-heaps of brickwork and timber. The enemy sent out a wireless message that the English gunners were destroying French property by bombarding the city, and then made a deep belt of destruction by blowing up long blocks of streets. After that our guns have completed the ruin, for there was a German garrison in every house, and in this kind of warfare there must be no tenderness of sentiment about bricks and mortar if the enemy is between the walls. So now in Lens the only cover for Germans and their only chance of safety is below ground in the tunnels and cellars reinforced by concrete and built by the forced labour of civilians two years and more ago when the city was menaced by a French attack. Into these tunnels the German garrisons of Lens make their way by night, and in them they live and die. Many die in

them it is certain, for a tunnel is no more than a death-trap when it is blocked at the entrance by the fall of houses, or when it collapses by the bombardment of heavy shells which pierce down deep and explode with monstrous effect. That has happened, as we know, in many parts of the German line, and recently on the French front whole companies of German soldiers were buried alive in deep caves. It is happening in Lens now, if the same effect is produced by the same power of artillery. But death comes to the German soldiers there in another way, without any noise and quite invisible, and very horrible in its quietude. Many times lately the Canadians have drenched the city of Lens with gas that kills, and soaks down heavily into dug-outs and tunnels, and stifles men in their sleep before they have time to stretch out a hand for a gas-mask, or makes them die with their masks on if they fumble a second too long. The enemy, who was first to use poison-gas, should wish to God he had never betrayed his soul by such a thing, for it has come back upon him as a frightful retribution, and in Lens, in those deep, dark cellars below the ruins, German soldiers must live with terror and be afraid to sleep.

Yesterday, when I went to that neighbourhood, I saw four German soldiers who had come out into the open, rather risking death there than by staying in their dungeon. They appeared for a minute round the corner of some brick-stacks in the Cité St.-Auguste. I was watching the German lines there, and staring at the ruined houses and slag-heaps and broken water-towers of Harnes and Annay, beyond the outer fields of the mining city. The church towers in both those villages still stand, though a little damaged, and some of the red roofs are still intact. The German lines were away beyond a strip of No Man's Land, and here not a soul was to be seen, no trace of life in all this land of death until suddenly I saw those four figures come stealthily up behind the brick-stacks. They stood up quite straight and looked towards our ground, and then after a second crouched low so that only their heads showed above a little dip in the ground. A few minutes later I saw two more Germans. They ran at a jog-trot along a hedge outside the Cité St.-Auguste and made a bolt through a gap. It was as strange to see them as though they were visitors from another planet, for, in this district of Lens, no man shows his body above ground unless he is careless of a quick death, and

one may stare for days at the empty houses and the broken mine-shafts and the high black slag-heaps without seeing any living thing.

On our side of the lines, during a long walk yesterday to the crest of Hill 70, I saw only a few lonely figures above ground, although below ground there were many, and in one dug-out where I was lucky to go I found a luncheon-party of officers discussing the psychology of Kerensky and news of the world one day old, and the chances of three years more of war or thirty, as men do round a London dinner-table, though there were loud, unpleasant noises overhead, where German shells were in flight to a trench which had been recommended to me as a nice safe place for a Sunday walk. Somehow, I did not believe in the safety of any walk in this neighbourhood, because there were fresh shell-holes along the tracks between the ruined houses which could not inspire the simplest soul with confidence. There is not a house there which has not been knocked edge-wise or upside down, and the little village church I passed is no longer a place for worship but a nightmare building, inhabited by the menace of death. The German gunners cannot leave these mining villages alone, though they are as deserted as the Polar regions, with no cheerful Tommy's face to be seen through any of the empty window-frames, or through any of the holed walls or down any of the sand-bag shelters which used to be the homes of British soldiers when the fighting was closer this way.

It is the loneliness which one hates most in these places, especially when shells come along with a beastly noise which seems a particular menace to one's own body as there is nobody else to be killed. So I was glad to fall in with a young officer who was working his way up the line. He had just brought down a wounded man, and was stopping a while in a wayside dressing-station, where there was a friendly and lonely doctor, who offered the hospitality of his sand-bags and steel girders to any passer-by, and said "Stay a bit longer" when bits of shell could be heard whining outside. We went along the way together, close to the grim old muck-heap, the Double Crassier, where Germans and English lived cheek by jowl for two years until recent weeks, fighting each other with bombs when they were bored with each other's company, and so past the village of Loos.

The way up to Hill 70 is historic ground, and every bit of brickwork, every stump of a tree, every yard or so of road, is haunted by the memory of gallant men, who in September just two years ago came this way under frightful shell-fire and fell here in great numbers. Among them were the Londoners of the glorious 47th Division and the Scots of the 15th—as I walked by the village of Loos I thought of some friends of mine in the Gordons who had great adventures there that day amongst those dreadful little ruins—and Hill 70 was taken and lost again after heroic fighting and tragic episodes, which are still remembered with a shudder by men who hate to think of them.

It is only a few weeks ago that we took the ground beyond in that great Canadian assault upon Hill 70 which I described at the time, and up there on the hill-side—it is not much of a hill, but goes up very gradually to the crest—the trenches are still littered with German relics, and in the deep dug-outs burnt out and blown out there are still German bodies lying. The smell of death comes out of these holes, and it is not a pleasant place.

Before the Canadian assault English troops of the glorious old 6th Division captured and held the approaches and raided the Germans in Nash Alley, which is a famous trench in the history of the Durhams and the Essex Regiment and of the Buffs and West Yorkshires, and resisted ferocious German attacks with the most grim courage. Under their pressure the Germans yielded part of their line one night, withdrawing to another line of trenches secretly, but these troops of ours followed them up so quickly that they were in the German dug-outs before the candles had gone out. The Canadian capture of Hill 70 was a great blow to the German command, and they tried vainly to get it back by repeated counter-attacks. They will never get it back now, and Lens, which lies below it, remains for them a death-trap, which only pride makes them hold, and where in the cellars men are forced to live hellishly under our shells and gas in order to uphold that pride in men who do not take the risks nor suffer the agony of this hidden death.

IX

LONDONERS IN GLENCORSE WOOD

AUGUST 17

THE battle of Langemarck yesterday, and all the struggle southward to the ground about Glencorse Wood and Inverness Copse was one of the most heroic as well as one of the bloodiest days of fighting in all this war. The enemy put up a fierce resistance except at points where underfed boys had been thrust out in shell-holes, as in the neighbourhood of Langemarck, to check the first onslaught of our men if possible, and if not to die. Behind them, as storm troops for counter-attack, were some of the finest troops of the German army. Among them was the 54th Division, which had already been severely mauled by our gun-fire and was utterly exhausted. But other divisions, like the 34th, who were in front of our Londoners, were fresh and strong, only just brought into the battle-line. Behind the immediate supporting troops were massed reserves whom the German command held ready to hurry up in wagons and light railways to any part of the field where their lines were most threatened, or when instant counter-attacks might inflict most damage on our men.

In gun-power the enemy was and is strong. He had prepared a large concentration of guns south-east of our right flank, and whatever may be his reserves of ammunition he has gathered up great stores for this present battle. On the right of our attack he stood on high ground, the crest of Polygon Wood, and the slopes down from Abraham Heights and the Gravenstafel Ridge. It is the big door which he must slam in our face at all costs, because it opens out to his plains beyond; and against it he has massed all his weight. Our men, it will be seen, were not likely to have a walk-over. They did not, but took all they gained by hard fighting. It could in no sense of the word be a walk-over. The ground was hideous, worse than in the winter on the Somme. That seems strange, with a hot sun shining overhead and dust rising in clouds along traffic roads behind the battle-line as I saw it to-day. That is the irony of things. Where our men were fighting yesterday and to-day there are hundreds of thousands of shell-holes, some

three feet deep and some ten feet deep, and each shell-hole is at least half full of water, and many of them are joined so that they form lakes deep enough to drown men and horses if they fall in. So it was, and is, around the place where Langemarck village stood, and where the old lake of the château that no longer stands has flooded over into a swamp, and where a double row of black tree-stumps goes along the track of the broken road where the people of Langemarck used to walk to church before the devil did in so many old churches and established little hells of his own on their rubbish-heaps. So it was yesterday and remains to-day all about, the stumps of trees sticking up out of a mush of slimy, pitted ground which go by the romantic names of Glencorse Wood and Inverness Copse, and Shrewsbury Forest and Polygon Wood. The photographs of our airmen taken yesterday in low flights over these damned places reveal the full foulness of them. Seen from this high view, they are long stretches of white barren earth pockmarked by innumerable craters, where no man or human body is to be seen, though there are many dead and some living lying in those holes, and they are all bright and shining, because the sun is glinting on the water which fills them, except where dense clouds of smoke from great gun-fire drift across.

The courage of men who attacked over such ground was great courage. The grim, stubborn way in which our soldiers made their way through these bogs and would not be beaten, though they slipped and fell and stuck deep while the enemy played machine-gun bullets on to their lines and flung high explosives over the whole stretch of bogland through which they had to pass, is one of the splendid and tragic things in our poor human story.

I told yesterday how some of our English battalions took Langemarck like this, leaving many comrades bogged, wounded, and spent, but crawling round the concrete houses, over the old cellars of the village and routing out the Germans who held them with machine-guns. At the block-house on the way up, called Au Bon Gîte, an oblong fort of concrete walls ten feet thick, the Germans bolted inside as soon as they saw our men, slammed down an iron door, and for a time stayed there while our bombers prowled round like hungry wolves waiting for their prey. Later they gave themselves up, because our line swept past them and they had no hope.

In another place of the same kind, called Reitre Farm, from which came a steady blast of machine-gun fire, our men made several desperate rushes and at last, when many lay wounded, a machine-gunner of ours got close and thrust the barrel of his weapon through a slit in the wall and swept the inner chamber with a flood of bullets.

There were savage fights in some of the dark cellars of Langemarck between men who would not surrender and men who would not turn back, and men who fell heavily against other men and knew that in these underground holes it must be their life or the other's, and the quicker the better. They fought their way beyond Langemarck yesterday, and on the left of our advance we hold to-day all the ground that was taken, which follows the curve of the Langemarck—Gheluvelt line, dug and wired by months of labour according to the orders of the German command, afraid of our coming menace, and now blotted out. The fighting all about this ground was by groups of English soldiers, in some cases without officers, and in some cases led by privates with a sense of leadership and fine, stern courage. They were Royal Fusiliers, Lancashire Fusiliers, Middlesex, Guernseys, and other battalions of the 29th Division, the Light Infantry battalions of the 20th Division, the Yorkshires, Lancashires, South Staffords, Lincolns, and Borderers of the 11th Division, and the Oxfords, Gloucesters, and Berkshires of the 48th Division. So things happened on the left of the battle. All ground was gained as it had been planned, and all held, and many hundreds of prisoners were taken, though that is not the best proof of success.

On the right it was different. It was on the right that the enemy fought hardest, counter-attacked most fiercely and most often, and concentrated the heaviest artillery. There were the Irish Brigades here, and English county troops of the 8th Division, and London battalions of the 56th. All this side of the attack became involved at once in desperate fighting. The ground was damnable—cratered and full of water and knee-deep in foul mud—and beyond them was high ground, struck through with gully-like funnels, through which the enemy could pour up his storm troops for counter-attack; and away in the mud were the same style of concrete forts as up north, still unbroken by our bombardments and fortified again with new garrisons of machine-gunners, taking the place of those who on

July 31 were killed or captured when this ground was stormed and, later, lost.

The English and the Irish battalions made progress in spite of heavy fire on them and no light losses; but in the afternoon of yesterday they had to withdraw from their advanced positions under the pressure of fierce counter-attacks by fresh troops. They fought these rear-guard actions stubbornly. Irish as well as English fought sometimes in small groups in isolated posts, until they were killed or captured. They made the enemy pay a big price in blood for his old ground, but their own casualties could not be light in view of the desperate character of this struggle.

As yet I know very few details of the Irish side of things. I know more about the Londoners, for I have been to see them to-day, and they have told me the facts of yesterday. They are tragic facts, because for English troops it is always a tragedy to withdraw from any yard of soil they have taken by hard fighting, and many good London lads will never come back from that morass. But there is nothing the matter with London courage, and to me there is something more thrilling in the way these boys fought to the death, some of them in the bitterness of retreat, than in the rapid and easy progress of men in successful attack. Lying out all night in the wet mud under heavy fire, they attacked at dawn up by Glencorse Wood, in the direction of Polygon Wood. On the right they and their neighbours at once came under blasts of fire from five machine-guns in a strong point, and under a hostile barrage-fire that was frightful in its intensity. They could not make much headway. No mortal men could have advanced under such fire, and so their comrades on the left were terribly exposed to the scythe of bullets which swept them also.

Men of London regiments—the Queen's Westminsters and the old "Vics" and the Rangers and the Kensingtons—fought forward with a wonderful spirit which is a white shining light in all this darkness—through Glencorse Wood and round to the north of Nuns' Wood, avoiding the most deeply flooded ground here, where there was one big boggy lake. Parties of the Middlesex went into Polygon Wood, which is a long way forward, and actually brought prisoners out of that place. At a strong point near the Hooge—Gheluvelt road they killed thirty-four Germans and captured the redoubt. But there were

Germans still left in other concrete houses near by, and they were very strong at the Zonnebeke position on the north-west.

Very soon counter-attacks developed from the south out of Inverness Copse, and from the north. The Londoners were exhausted after their deadful night and all this fighting over foul ground; they were in exposed positions, and they were shut in by the most terrible gun-fire. What happened with the Irish and other troops happened here. Our airmen, flying low, saw small isolated groups of London boys fighting separate battles against great odds. The enemy was encircling them, and they were trying to hold rear-guard positions, so that their comrades could withdraw in good order. A signalled message that found its way to headquarters tells one such story. I read to-day the little pink slip bearing the words as they came in. They are from a Middlesex officer. "Am in shell-hole before second objective, and two strong points held by the enemy. Have ten men with me. We are surrounded, and heavy machine-gun fire is being turned on us. Regret no course but to surrender. Can't see any of our forces."

That message was the only one of its kind received, but there were many small groups of London men, led by young officers, or without officers, who held on to the last like that, and did not let down the pride of their great city, so gay, so ignorant yesterday afternoon, with a tide of traffic swirling down its streets, while out here on the wet barren earth, under the same sun, these boys of London fought and died, or in small groups rose from among their dead and wounded and went white-faced into the circle of the enemy who had surrounded them.

X

SOMERSETS AT LANGEMARCK

AUGUST 19

THE enemy, after denying our taking of Langemarck, now admit their loss of it. Our prisoners who were brought through the place had the German wireless read out to them and were abashed by the untruth of the message. It was a German sergeant-major who put up the only excuse. He laughed and said: "In this war it is only those who win who can

afford to tell the official truth. A reverse is always covered by a lie."

We are well beyond Langemarck, and to-day I went among the men who got there first—the 20th Division—fighting their way past machine-gun blockhouses, which is the new system of German defence, past the deadly machine-gun fire that came out of them, and through to the village and its surrounding swamps. These young officers, who have lost many of their comrades, and these men of theirs belonging to light-infantry battalions, were sleeping and resting in their tents behind the fighting-lines, and cleaning themselves up after days in wet mud and the filth of the battlefield. But they were keen to tell the tale of their adventures, and if I could put them down just as they were told, one man adding to another man's story, the excitement of remembrance rousing them from their weariness, and queer grim laughter breaking out when they spoke of their greatest dangers, it would be a strange narrative. They were men who had escaped death by prodigious chance, and officers and men greeted each other joyfully and with a splendid spirit of comradeship as brothers-in-arms who were glad to see each other alive and remembered how they had stuck it together in the worst hours. They belonged to the Somerset Light Infantry of the 20th Division, and they came from old towns like Bridgwater and Crewkerne and Yeovil, which seem a million miles away from such scenes of war. One young officer of the Somersets knew most of what had happened, and his own adventures that day would fill a book if told in detail. He took me into his tent and showed me how his kit had been pierced by bullets and torn by the blast of shell-fire, and he marvelled that he had no more than a hurt hand cut against the teeth of a German sniper and a body bruised all over, but with a whole skin. "A bit of luck," he said. This young man must have been born under a lucky star, for the things he went through that day would have frightened a cat relying on nine lives and taking a hundred chances on the score of them.

On the way up to Langemarck to the left of that solid block-house called Au Bon Gîte, where the enemy held out behind iron doors while our troops went past them swept by machine-gun fire, there were many German snipers lying about in shell-holes. They were very brave men, put out into these

holes to check our advance, and knowing that they were bound to die, because that is the almost certain fate of snipers on such ground. They lay doggo, pretending to be corpses when any of our men were near enough to see, but using their rifles with deadly aim when they had any elbow-room. I heard that one man killed four of our officers, and another killed fourteen men and wounded eleven before he was shot through the head. One of these men well behind our advancing waves lay very still, close to the young officer of the Somersets of whom I spoke, and who saw the fellow move and raise his rifle. He pounced on him and struck him across the face with his bare fist and tore his hand open against the man's teeth. They were bad teeth, and the hand is now festering. Another sniper gave himself away, and the young officer shot him through the head with a revolver, which was very busy all that day. I have already told how these light-infantry men had to struggle through bogs around Langemarck, how they fell into shell-holes full of water, and how, under great fire, they made their way into the place where Langemarck village had once been and attacked the dug-outs and blockhouses there. Some of the strangest episodes happened between the village and a point called the Streiboom. There were two more blockhouses on the Langemarck road girdled by machine-gun fire. The first one was rushed by twenty men, led by this young officer I have been telling about, and bombed until thirty Germans tumbled out and surrendered. But beyond was the other blockhouse, and upon this the officer of the Somersets advanced with only six men. A machine-gun was firing from the right of it, and it was a strong place of concrete with no open door. The seven Somersets went straight for it, and the officer flung two bombs through the loopholes, but they did not seem to take effect. Then he hurled two more bombs, which were his last, at the iron door, but they did not burst. With his bare fists he beat at the door and shouted out, "Come out, you blighters, come out." Presently, to his surprise, they came out, not two or three, nor six or seven, but forty-two stout and hefty men. Among them was an English soldier badly wounded, who had been taken prisoner three days before. He was a Yorkshireman, who had lain among the enemy, well treated, but dying. The Germans could not send him behind their lines because of our bombardment, which had

cut off their supplies, so that they were four days hungry when they surrendered. In another dug-out was another Yorkshireman, and he is now safe and well behind our own lines.

There were eight machine-guns in that last blockhouse, one of which I saw to-day, and two of them, fitted up with new springs, were used against the enemy. One of them was worked on a hydraulic lift, so that it could be got into action very quickly from its underground place. In the blockhouse from which the forty-two had been taken by this small body of Somersets was a great store of 5·9 shells. All told this little group of men took 100 prisoners that day, and their officer himself is said to have killed sixteen Germans and to have wounded many more. After the blockhouse affair he chased a number of the enemy running down the Langemarck road, and, using his revolver in the cowboy fashion, dropping his wrist from the shoulder, he plugged them as he ran. After that he went on and held an exposed advanced post with a mixed lot of Somersets and "Koylies" (King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry) and Rifle Brigade men. They had next to no ammunition, but they held on all night, hoping for the best, but not sure of it. And this young officer who was their leader told me to-day that—great God!—he "enjoyed" himself and was "fearfully bucked" with his day's work. The excitement of it all was in his eyes, as he told me, in much more detail than I have given, the story of the thirty-six hours.

It is indeed an astounding chapter of courage all this attack on Langemarck by men who before the attack had been bombarded with gas and other shells, and who then floundered in deep bogs, where they got stuck up to the waist, but worked in small parties up and on, fighting all the way against an enemy who put up a gallant and stubborn resistance and sold every hundred yards of ground as dearly as he could. The runners who went back again and again through that slough of despond under damnable fire were real heroes. The stretcher-bearers who carried down the wounded all that day and night regardless of their own lives were beyond words splendid, and the carriers who brought up rations so that the men in front should have enough to eat and drink were as brave as those who fought. In the midst of all this turmoil, all this death,

all this mud and blood, men kept their sense of humour and their shrewd wit in a way which beats me. "Do you speak English?" said a sergeant-major to a German non-commissioned officer who came out of a dug-out full of men. "Nein, nein," said the man. "Well, you've got to learn bally quick," said the sergeant-major, "so go and tell those pals of yours to come out before something happens to them." And the German learnt enough English in the sergeant-major's eyes to deliver the command correctly enough.

I have spoken only of the Somersets. Other light infantry —the Durhams and the "Koylies" and the D.C.L.I.—who worked with them and who took Reitres Farm and other strong points, were not less dogged, and this day at Langemarck was a glorious revelation of the old spirit of the West Country, which is still strong and fine.

And now I must write again about the Canadians, whose attack towards Lens I watched the other day among our guns.

That story is not yet finished, and has been going on ever since that morning when the Canadians took Hill 70 and the cités of St.-Emile and St.-Laurent, working forward towards the heart of Lens. It is clear that the enemy's command issued orders for Hill 70 and the other ground to be retaken at all costs. There have been no fewer than thirteen counter-attacks against the Canadian troops, and men of the 4th Guards Division, and later of the 220th Regiment, have come forward in wave after wave and hurled themselves with desperate courage against the Canadian defence.

Time after time they have been seen assembling by our flying men and observers, and time after time their ranks have been shattered by our guns. To the north of Lens there is a chalk quarry, which was not gained by the Canadians in their first attack, so that they established their line on the west side of it, and it was against this line that repeated efforts were made. Each attempt was smashed up, and then the Canadians advanced into the quarry and captured ninety men of many units and twenty machine-guns. The prisoners complain that their officers had lost their heads, and had been utterly demoralized. After violent attacks on Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday, the enemy made a great effort with every weapon of frightfulness on Friday evening, using poison-gas and flame-

jets and a hurricane of high explosives in order to drive the Canadians off Hill 70. It failed with great losses to themselves when the German infantry attacked, and the attacks yesterday have had no greater success. The Canadians claim that the enemy's losses must be at least three times as great as their own. There were moments when the Canadians were hard pressed, and one of them was when a battalion commander was warned that the Germans were behind him. "I'm all right," he said cheerily, and then suddenly he said, "Good Lord, so they are." He was not heard from again for two hours and a half, and in that time he had organized his clerks and batmen and signallers and driven out a party of Germans who had worked out round No Man's Land and thrust a wedge behind him. The fighting has been savage and fierce, and the Canadians have used the bayonet at close quarters and fought hand to hand in the dark cellars of the mining cités. This phase of the war is as bloody as anything that has been done in the history of human strife.

XI

THE IRISH IN THE SWAMPS

AUGUST 21

IT is of the Irish now that I will write, though their story is four days old and not a tale of great victory. It is easier to write of success than of failure, and of great advances than of grim rear-guard actions fought by men desperately tried but still heroic. But I want to tell the story of the Irish who went forward over bad ground on the morning of August 16, that morning when there was great success at Langemarck on the left, and something less than success on the right.

These Irishmen had no luck at all. They gained ground but lost it again. It is up to the Irish to tell this tale, for they were grand men and they fought and fell with simple valour. They were the Southern Irish and the men of Ulster side by side again, as they were at Wytschaete, where I met them on the morning of the battle and afterwards, glad because they had taken a great share in one of the finest victories of the war. Their laughter rang out then as they told me their adventures, all their young officers keen to say how splendid their men had

been, and the men themselves drawing cheerful comparisons between this day's luck and that other day at Ginchy, on the Somme, when they gained another victory, but with thinned ranks, so that when I met them marching out they had but the remnants of battalions, and their general called out words of good cheer to them with a break in his voice. After Wytschaete they were in high spirits. Quick in attack, full of the old Irish dash, they were the men for a sudden assault, needing an impetuous advance, while they were fresh and unspoilt. But they had no luck this time.

Let me tell first the happenings of the Irish troops on the right, the Catholic Irish, whose own right was on the Roulers railway, going up to the Potsdam Redoubt. An hour or so before the attack the enemy, as though knowing what was about to come, flung down a tremendous and destructive barrage, answered by our own drum-fire, which gave the signal for the Irish to advance. The Dublin Fusiliers and the Royal Irish Rifles went forward on the right and the Inniskillings on the left. In front of them were numbers of German strong points, the now famous pill-boxes, or concrete blockhouses, which the enemy has built as his new means of defence to take the place of trench systems. They were Beck House, Borry Farm, and the Bremen Redoubt—sinister names which will never be forgotten in Irish history. There were also odd bits of trench here and there for the use of snipers and small advanced posts. As the first wave of the Irish assaulting troops advanced Germans rose from those ditches and ran back to the shelter of the concrete works, and immediately from those emplacements and from other machine-gun positions echeloned in depth behind them swept a fierce enfilade fire of machine-gun bullets, even through the barrage of our shell-fire, which went ahead of the Irish line. Many men in the first wave dropped, but the others kept going, and reached almost as far as they had been asked to go. The Royal Irish Rifles worked up the Roulers railway to the level crossing, and captured two German officers and thirty prisoners. The Dublin Fusiliers, on their left, were held up by machine-guns from the Bremen Redoubt, and later a message came down from that small party. It was from a young Irish subaltern. "I am lying out here in a shell-hole. All officers and men killed or wounded." Other men joined him, but were cut off and taken

prisoners. On the left the Inniskillings, who had crossed over the Zonnebeke river, made good and rapid progress, capturing two strong redoubts and seizing an important little hill—Hill 37—which was one of the keys of the position. The success of the day would have been gained if the centre had been carried, and if the supporting troops could have come up. But neither of these things happened. The supporting waves were caught by the cross-fire of machine-guns, and they could make hardly any headway. The Borry Farm Redoubt gave most trouble. It contained five machine-guns and a garrison of sixty expert and determined gunners, and never fell all day. It broke the centre of the Irish attack, and was the cause of heroic but deadly efforts by the Irish Rifles, followed by Inniskillings. The Royal Irish Fusiliers attacked it by direct assault, knowing that everything was staked on their success. They went for it like tigers, but without avail. One of the battalion officers, seeing this failure, but knowing how all depended upon the capture of that fort, thereupon led another attack by a company of the Royal Irish Rifles. This met the same fate.

Meanwhile the men of the Ulster Division were fighting just as desperately. They had ahead of them several of the concrete forts, one of which, near Pond Farm, was a strong defensive system with deep dug-outs and overhead cover proof against shell-fire. This and other strong points had wooden platforms above the concrete walls, on which the gunners could mount their machines very quickly, firing them behind two yards thickness of concrete.

Opposite the Pommern Redoubt stands a small hill which the enemy has used for a long time as one of his chief observation-posts, as it gives a complete view of our ground. Beyond that the country rises to a saddle-back ridge, with double spurs guarded on the lower slope by a small fort called Gallipoli, and from these spurs he could fling a machine-gun barrage across the low ground. An ugly position to attack. It was worse for the Ulster men because of the state of the ground, which was a thin crust over a bog of mud. On the left some of the Inniskillings and Irish Rifles rushed forward as far as a network of trenches and wired defences, which they took in a fierce assault against a Bavarian garrison, who fought to a finish. Here they recaptured one of our Lewis guns lost in the

fighting on July 31. On the right the Irish Rifles and the Fusiliers, walking through the fire of many machine-guns, made a straight attack upon Hill 35, which dominated the centre of the Ulster attack. Before it were some gun-pits, and the Ulster men, by most desperate efforts, took and crossed these pits and fought up the slopes of the hill beyond. But they could not keep the hill nor the pits. So after many hours of frightful fighting the situation was that some scattered groups of Dublins and Royal Irish held out on a far goal with exposed flanks, with some Inniskillings clinging to the slopes of Hill 37, while on the other side of the Zonnebeke river the Ulster men had been forced off their little hill, and had been unable to get beyond the German chain of concrete houses.

The enemy's aeroplanes came over to survey the situation, and, taking a leaf from our book, flew very low, firing their machine-guns at the advanced posts of Irish lying in shell-holes and in the hummocky ground. They were in a desperate position, those advanced posts. . . . Then the enemy launched his counter-attack from the direction of Zonnebeke, and gradually the shattered lines of the Irish fell back, slowly fighting little rear-guard actions in isolated groups. Many of them were surrounded and cut off, or had to fight their way back in the night or the dawn of next day.

All through the worst hours an Irish padre went about among the dead and dying, giving absolution to his boys. Once he came back to headquarters, but he would not take a bite of food or stay, though his friends urged him. He went back to the field to minister to those who were glad to see him bending over them in their last agony. Four men were killed by shell-fire as he knelt beside them, and he was not touched—not touched until his own turn came. A shell burst close, and the padre fell dead.

There were many other men who gave up their lives for their friends that day—stretcher-bearers, who had a long way to go under fire, and runners, who had to crawl on their stomachs from shell-hole to shell-hole, and carrying-parties and medical officers. Near the Frezenberg Redoubt, which was on the right of the Catholic Irish, a doctor worked, never sleeping for days and nights, but going out of his dug-out to crawl after wounded men and bandaging up their wounds under heavy fire. The

first man he found was not one of his Irish. Away in front of the line, in No Man's Land, was a bogged Tank, and Irish sentries heard a wail from it. The doctor heard of this and crept out to the Tank and found a Scottish soldier there badly wounded, as he had crept into this shelter days before. The doctor bandaged him, and, without calling for help, carried him back on his own shoulders. Another Scot was found in a shell-hole wounded in both legs. He was one of the Gordons, and had been lying there since July 31. He is "in a good state of health," was the report of the Irish patrol, and will be sent home to-night.

Before the battle and after it the Bavarians behaved decently about the wounded, and allowed the stretcher-bearers to work in the open without being shelled, though some of them were hit in the machine-gun barrage. It is good to know that, and fair to say it. The Bavarians against the Irish fought, as I am told by Irishmen, in a clean, straight way, and their defence was stronger than our attack. The Irish troops had no luck. It was a day of tragedy. But poor Ireland should be proud of these sons of hers, who struggled against such odds and fought until their strength was spent, and even then held on in far posts with a spirit scornful of the word "surrender." Some very noble young officers gave up their lives rather than say that word, and all these dear Irish boys went to the last limit of human endurance before they fell back. Not by any hair's-breadth did they lose the honour they won at Wytschaete and Ginchy.

XII

THE WAY THROUGH GLENCORSE WOOD

AUGUST 22

THERE was severe fighting again to-day eastwards of St.-Julien (3½ miles north-east of Ypres), extending south across the Zonnebeke, beyond the Frezenberg Redoubt, while on the right our troops again penetrated Glencorse Copse (due east of Ypres), and fought on that ugly rising ground which the enemy is defending in great strength. The Divisions engaged, from north to south, are the 29th, 38th, 11th, 48th, 18th, 61st, 15th, 19th, 47th, 14th, and 24th.

On the left progress has been made from the high road of St.-

Julien to the Zonnebeke—Langemarck road, which cuts across it, guarded on the enemy's side by two strong points with the usual concrete shelters which the Germans have adopted as their new means of forward defence. Below them there is another strong position called Winnipeg, about which our men were heavily engaged in the early hours of this morning, and below that again the same series of pill-boxes and concrete blockhouses against which the Irish battalions went forward with such desperate valour on the 16th of this month, as I described in my message yesterday.

Scottish troops of the 15th Division attacked to-day where the Southern Irish were engaged six days ago. Before them they had those sinister forts, Beck House and Borry Farm, and Vampire Point guarding the way to the Bremen Redoubt, which will be remembered always in the history of the Irish brigades as places of heroic endeavour, just as now this morning they will take their place in the annals of our Scottish fighting. To the left of them are other forts, round which the Ulster men were fighting last week—Pond Farm, Schuler Farm, and others on the way to the Gallipoli Redoubt. About these places Warwickshires and other Midland troops of the 61st Division have been fighting, and have met with the same difficulties, apart from the state of the ground, which has dried a little. It has not dried much, for our shell-fire has broken up the gullies and streams with which it was drained, and the country is water-logged, so that the pools remain until the sun dries them up. The shell-holes and these ponds are not so full of water as when the Irish went across, and the surface of the shell-broken earth is hardening. But it is only a thin crust over a bog, so that the Tanks which went forward to-day here and there could not get very far without sinking in. One Tank was taken by a gallant crew almost as far as a German strong point nearly half a mile beyond our old front line very early in the morning. and did good work up there. The enemy put down a furious barrage-fire soon after the attack had started to-day, and kept the Frezenberg Redoubt under intense bombardment. But as soon as the attack developed he could not use his artillery against our men at many points, not knowing what forts and ground were still held by his own troops. He relied again upon the cross-fire of machine-guns, arranged very skilfully in depth, for enfilade barrages, and upon the garrisons who held his concrete redoubts

in the advanced positions. In one of the blockhouses this morning our Warwickshire men captured forty-seven prisoners, who, when they were surrounded, took refuge in tunnelled galleries running to the right of the main fort, called Schuler Farm. Some of our men fought through the enfilade fire of machine-guns as far as the slopes of Hill 35, and to the right of this the Scots made a gallant and fierce assault towards Bremen Redoubt.

AUGUST 30

The sky of Flanders is still full of wind and water, and heavy rain-storms driven by the gale sweep over the battlefield, flinging down trees already broken by shell-fire. Behind the lines some of the hopfields round Poperinghe and other villages are sadly wrecked. Many of the hop-poles have fallen, and the long trailing hops lie all tangled in the mire. Many telephone wires were down also just after the gale, and the signallers had a rough windy time in getting them up again. But it is on the field of battle that this weather matters most, and there in such places as Glencorse Wood and Inverness Copse and Sanctuary Wood on our side of the lines, the linked shell-craters are ponds. In and between them is a quagmire.

I write of Glencorse Wood and Inverness Copse rather than of the ground farther north, in the valley of the Steenbeek, though that is just as bad, or a little worse, because yesterday I went to see the troops of the 14th Division who made the last attack in those sinister woodlands in the track of the London men who fought there so desperately on July 31.

The last attack, beginning on August 22, was made by light-infantry regiments, among whom were the Duke of Cornwall's and the Somerset Light Infantry. They were fine well-trained men—trained hard and trained long in the tactics of assault—and though they took ground which they could not hold, because the enemy was in great strength against them and they were weakened after hard fighting in frightful ground, they held off repeated counter-attacks and inflicted great loss upon the enemy, and held their original line intact against most fierce assaults. The enemy's storm troops advanced against them through Inverness Copse, and in encircling movements which tried to get round and through their flanks again and again during two days of violent fighting, they counter-attacked behind the barrage-fire of many batteries, so that all the ground

held by our men was swept by high explosives and shrapnel hour after hour, and when these waves of Saxons and Prussians were broken or repulsed, others came with a sheet of flame before them—from "flammenwerfer" machines, which project fire like water from a fireman's hose. Our riflemen and light infantry did not break before this advancing furnace, but fired into the heart of it, and saw some of the "flammenwerfer" men go up in their own flame like moths bursting in the light of a candle with loud reports, "a loud pop" as the men describe it, so that nothing of them was left but a little smoke and a few cinders.

But that was at the end of the battle, and the light-infantry battalions had fought through terrible hours before they faced that last ordeal. Before the attack they held a line opposite Glencorse Wood on the left and running down on the right past Stirling Castle, the old German fort above a nest of dug-outs, which has become famous in all this fighting. In front of them lay Inverness Copse, a thousand yards long by 500 deep, with many concrete blockhouses hidden, or half hidden, among the fallen trees and tattered stumps and upheaved earth of this blasted wood; and north-east of that, ruins of an old château called Herenthage Castle.

Facing our left were three lines of battered trenches north of Inverness Copse, and two blockhouses called L-shaped Farm —on an aeroplane photograph it looks exactly like the capital letter—and Fitzclarence Farm. These places were strongly garrisoned, and the German machine-gunners were safe within their concrete walls from any shell-splinters. Our barrage swept on to the enemy's lines, flung up the earth, crashed among the trees, and tore all this belt of land to chaos, where already it was deeply cratered by the earlier bombardment. Behind that barrage went over the light-infantry battalions, and immediately they came under gusts of machine-gun fire from the blockhouses which still stood intact. It was then 7 o'clock in the morning. They forced their way into Inverness Copse, followed by some Tanks, and roved round one of the blockhouses, where thirty Germans sat inside with their steel doors shut and their machine-guns firing through the loop-holes. Some sappers were sent for, and blew in the doors, and the garrison were killed fighting.

The Duke of Cornwall's men were checked for a time by

machine-gun fire from Glencorse Wood, and advance waves were held up round a blockhouse with a garrison of sixty men north of Inverness Copse, but after fierce fighting this place fell, and not a man escaped. The Somerset Light Infantry passed on, and fought their way to the rubbish-heap called Herenthage Château, where a hundred and twenty Germans of the 145th Infantry Regiment held out in concrete chambers. Only their officer remained alive after the fighting here, and he was brought in a prisoner.

The Somersets established themselves in their goal with posts in front of Inverness Copse and Herenthage Castle, but on the left the Cornish lads were held up by machine-gun fire east of "Clapham Junction," where there was another fortified farm with sixty men and six machine-guns inside. A Tank came up and sat outside the place, firing point-blank at its walls, and the Cornwalls followed it and burst the doors in and fought until again not a single German remained alive, after a terrible bayonet contest. So the attack had succeeded, but with forces now heavily reduced. It was now ten o'clock in the morning. The story that follows is one long series of counter-attacks. It began with a barrage which came down with a tempest of shells half-way through Inverness Copse. For miles around the German batteries concentrated their fire on this ground and raked it. From the east of Inverness Copse, and at the same time from the south, storming parties of Germans advanced behind this great gun-fire and, though the first attack was broken and then the second by rifles and machine-guns, a third developed in greater strength. A runner came down from the Somersets—one of those brave runners who all day long and next day worked to and fro through dreadful barrage-fire until many were killed and other men went out to search for those dead boys and look for their dispatches, unless they had been blown to bits. The message from the Somersets reported that they could not hold on. They were being enclosed on both flanks, and proposed to fall back half-way through Inverness Copse, and this was done. Some reserves from light-infantry battalions were thrown in to strengthen the line, and the Cornwalls threw out a defensive flank with strong points.

At midday another attack was made on the Somersets, and driven off by rifles and machine-guns, and at two o'clock they reported that the enemy was massing in an attempt to turn their

left flank, which was then weak. The artillery answered an urgent call, and the German assembly was destroyed. So the evening came and the night, and the Light Infantry held on east of Stirling Castle and partly in Inverness Copse with many dead and wounded about them, and lines of German dead in front of them, awaiting riflemen coming to their support.

In a brigade headquarters a group of officers waited more anxiously for this help, having more responsibility. They sat with wet towels about their heads and eyes, in poisonous fumes and dreadful stenches which crept down from above, where heavy shells burst incessantly, shaking all the earth and blowing out the candles. The concrete ceiling bulged in. Runners came in white-faced and shaking, after frightful journeys, and officers bent to the candlelight to read scribbled messages sent down by hard-pressed men. Outside were the groans of wounded men.

At dawn, Tanks went out to attack the strong points north of Inverness Copse, where the enemy had rallied again, and one of them approached Fitzclarence Farm and broke up a counter-attacking preparation there. Some Germans ran into the blockhouse there and shot down the steel doors and lay doggo. Others came out of a trench to attack the Tank, but fled before the fire. Later in the morning German aeroplanes came out and flew very low and played their machine-guns on to our men, but without doing much harm.

From 1 A.M. to 3.30 A.M. the enemy kept a terrific barrage over all our ground, and then flamed out all along the line the signal of a new counter-attack. It was the "flammenwerfer" attack against the Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry, and the whole sky was red with the light of these advancing fire-jets. For a time, in spite of the enemy's heavy losses, the Cornwalls had to retire before these far-reaching flames, but they rallied and went forward again, driving the enemy part of the way back, where he was swept by our artillery-fire. The enemy kept up a steady barrage-fire over three wide belts, and an officer who went up to report the position had the worst hours of his life on that journey through bursting shells and over the fields of dead. But in spite of a message that had come down reporting a new withdrawal, it was found that the line was intact, and that the thin ranks of Light Infantry and King's Royal Rifles had beaten back all the enemy's assaults, and had destroyed their spirit for further attacks by most deadly losses. We could not hold Inverness

Copse, but the fighting here was worthy of men who, during two years of war, have fought with steadfast courage and have many acts of heroism in their long record.

XIII

THE SLAUGHTER-HOUSE OF LENS

AUGUST 23

ONE day, when it is possible to get in and around Lens, the veil will be torn from a human charnel-house, or, rather, from charnel-houses which none of us may yet enter or see through the drifting smoke. Yesterday I looked down on Lens and saw its roofless buildings and its gaping walls, but I could only guess at the scenes which are hidden below ground there in the tunnels where the Germans assemble for their counter-attacks against the Canadians, and to which they drag back their dead and wounded. Those places must reek with the smell of death and corruption, for the losses of the Prussian Guards during the last few days, and of other divisions who have come up against the Canadians, have been, I am told and believe, enormous. The Canadians tell me that their troops have never had harder or more prolonged fighting, not even in their old days of the Ypres salient nor on the Somme. Every hundred yards of the ground they have taken, and during the last week or so they have taken thousands of yards of open country and of ruined streets in and about the mining cités, until they have forced their way into Lens itself, have been contested by desperate fighting and held against unceasing counter-attacks delivered by great bodies of picked German troops supported by monstrous bombardments. Imagination can, if it likes, picture the slaughter involved in all this to those German assault troops, because they have not succeeded in gaining their purpose, and counter-attacks like that, in those numbers and in that strength, are shattered when they do not succeed. It is a wonderful tribute to the Canadians and to their grim tenacity that, after all the repeated counter-attacks against them, and after storms of fire from batteries which have increased in number every day, they hold their lines round Lens intact as they stood on August 15 and 16, and have

gained an entry into the streets of Lens and swung up southwards with increasing pressure.

Lens is packed tight with German troops. They belong to the 4th Guards Division, and latterly to the 1st Guards Reserve, the crack division of the German army, which had a month's rest at Cambrai before being sent into this slaughter-house. For although that city is tunnelled throughout, all the cellars being linked up and strengthened with massive concrete, so that even heavy shells cannot pierce down to them, men cannot fight in tunnels if they are on the offensive, and must get out of them to make their counter-attacks. It is at those times that they suffer more hideously than in any other battle.

Our aeroplanes are always watching for these assemblies. To take only one case out of many, they reported a mass of men in a certain square of Lens the day before yesterday. Our guns turned on to them, not only our field-guns but our heavies, up to those howitzers which could batter down a massive fortress after a few rounds. Men under the fire of such shells as those things send do not escape in great numbers. Most of them die. The Prussians in the square of Lens were caught by this hurricane fire, and before they could get into the tunnels many were blown to bits.

Yesterday as I looked down on Lens the fire had quietened on both sides, as though the guns were tired. For several minutes at a time there was a great quietude over the city of doom, and as the afternoon sun lay warm upon its red walls, and cast black shadows across its deserted streets, where no single figure walked, it was hard to believe that a few hours before swarms of men had been fighting on the edge of those houses, and that the place was full of new dead and old. The water of the Souchez river was as blue as the sky, which was deep bright blue above wispy clouds. A little light glinted from the white church tower which a shell has smashed off at the top. Perhaps some German officer was there staring through his glasses, or perhaps it was only a bit of metal caught by the sun. A smoke-barrage drifted densely across the northern side of the city, and every now and then there came a sharp vicious hammering of machine-guns to show that somewhere in those ruins men were alive and watchful. Then the guns got busy again, but in a slow, unhurried way. The enemy had a hate against the outer edge of Liévin, and every

two minutes smote it with a great shell, which burst with big billowing smoke-clouds, and a flash which was followed by a low, sullen roar. He flung shells as big as this into Angres and Avion, but seemed to rely on machine-gun fire to barrage our lines nearest to his own. Behind me to the right were some of our big howitzers, old friends of mine, whose voices I prefer at a mile or two's distance. They tuned up their bass viols and played their dead march. Perhaps it was their shells I saw smashing on to the German defences. Rosy clouds went up, and in those clouds the dust of red-brick houses went up, too, leaving gaps of nothingness where the buildings had once been. There was a kite-balloon in the sky behind me with the wispy clouds like white horse-tails all curled about it, and presently there came riding above it several coveys of aeroplanes, so that the sky was filled with their loud drone-song. They flew round about Lens, and only a few German "Archies" tried to strafe them with bursts of shrapnel. They flew not very high above the mining city, circling round and round like hawks before swooping to their prey. The guns were loud but shrill; and sweet and clear above them a bugle sounded from some camp of ours behind the lines among the cornfields all gold and glowing in the evening light, with a little shadow sleeping beside each stook; and it blew the evening retreat. It is the first time I have heard a bugle play that call so near to the guns, and it stirred one's heart with a queer sense of emotion, as though its music belonged to the spirit world. The night closed down on the battlefields but did not bring peace. Below the stars there were many strange lights and fires and sounds. A tall bank of clouds was pierced with lightning so like shell-fire, except for a longer tremor of light, that men looked and wondered what devilry was on over there in the back areas. The devilry was round about. It was time for the German raiders to come out under the cover of darkness, and they came and dropped their bombs over quiet villages and among the cornfields and the hop-gardens. The explosions came up with sharp flashes and gruff roars from dark fields between black belts of trees. From the earth hands of light stretched up, reaching up to the clouds and touching them with their finger-tips. They felt their way for those flying raiders, groped about like hands searching in a dark room, and then clasped each other. In the archway below their long straight arms

shrapnel glinted like confetti. Our anti-aircraft guns had got their target. Along the lines rockets were rising, giving a second or two of white steady light to No Man's Land, with fringes of trees etched blackly against it. Somewhere a dump —ours or the enemy's—had been hit, and the clouds above it were tipped with scarlet flame. So then the night scene began as usual, and as it is played out below the stars every night. And somewhere in Lens the Prussians were preparing for a new counter-attack, while German doctors in deep tunnels stared down upon a mass of wounded which was their day's harvest. Into one of the houses there the night before, where fifteen German soldiers lay in the cellar after a day of prodigious fighting, a party of Canadian raiders appeared and dragged them all out to a ditch over the way in the Canadian lines. Well may the German prisoners say to these men of ours, "You give us no rest." There is never a night's rest in Lens nor round about it unless men are put to sleep for ever. Many of them were put to sleep by thousands of gas-shells fired into the town by our artillery a night ago as an answer to German gas. Perhaps they were glad of it, for the wakeful hours in Lens must be hell on earth.

AUGUST 24

To the south of Lens there is a slag-heap overgrown with weeds called the Green Crassier. It is clearly visible across the Souchez river beyond a broken bridge, and I have often seen it from the lower slopes of Vimy. It was the scene of fierce fighting yesterday, for in the morning the Canadians, who are showing an indomitable spirit after ten days of most furious attacks and counter-attacks, launched an assault upon it and seized the position. Later in the day the enemy came back in strength and, after violent efforts, succeeded in thrusting the Canadians off the crest of this old mound of cinders, though they still cling to the western side. It is another incident in the long series of fierce and bloody encounters which since the battle of Vimy, on April 9, have surrounded the city of Lens and given to its streets and suburbs a sinister but historic fame. The Canadians have fought here with astounding resolution. They have hurled themselves against fortress positions, and by sheer courage have smashed their way through streets entangled with quick-set hedges of steel, through houses alive with machine-gun fire, through trenches

dug between concrete forts, through tunnels under red-brick ruins, sometimes too strong to be touched by shell-fire, and through walls loopholed for rifle-fire and hiding machine-gun emplacements designed to enfilade the Canadian line of advance. Through the cités of St.-Laurent, St.-Théodore, and St.-Emilie, to the north and west of Lens, they have fought past high slag-heaps and pit-heads, along railway embankments, and down sunken roads, until they have broken a route through frightful defences to the western streets of the inner city.

Every day, and sometimes many times a day, they have been counter-attacked by swarms of Germans coming up out of their tunnels, and between these attacks they have been under terrific gun-fire from a wide semicircle of heavy batteries. In the early days of the war the French fought like this through the streets of Vermelles, smashing their way from one wall to another, from one house to another, and over trenches dug across the streets. That fighting in Vermelles stands as one of the most frightful episodes of the war, and when I first went there I stood aghast at the relics of this bloody struggle. But Vermelles is hardly more than a village, and the mining district of Lens, with all its suburbs, covers several square miles of ground, so that the Canadians have had a longer and a harder task. Six German divisions have attacked them in turn, and have been shattered against them. These are the 7th and 8th, the 4th Guards Division, the 11th Reserve, the 220th, and the 1st Guards Reserve Division. In addition to these six divisions, some portions, at any rate, of the 185th Division and of the 36th Reserve Division have been engaged. The total German strength used at Lens must well exceed fifty battalions, and the German losses may perhaps be estimated at between 12,000 to 15,000 men.

The Canadians themselves have been hard pressed at times, but have endured the exhaustion of a savage struggle with amazing strength of spirit, grimly and fiercely resolved to hold their gains, unless overwhelmed by numbers in their advanced positions, as it has sometimes happened to them. But it is no wonder that some of the men whom I met yesterday coming out of that city of blood and death looked like men who had suffered to the last limit of mental and bodily resistance. Their faces were haggard and drawn. Their eyes were heavy. Their skin was grey as burnt ash. Some of them walked like drunken

men, drunk with sheer fatigue, and as soon as they had reached their journey's end some of them sat under the walls of a mining village with their chalky helmets tilted back, drugged by the need of sleep, but too tired even for that. They were men of the battalions who three days ago came face to face with the enemy in No Man's Land, a stretch of barren cratered earth between St.-Emilie and the northern streets of Lens, and fought him there until many dead lay strewn on both sides, and their ammunition was exhausted. An officer of one of these battalions came out of a miner's cottage to talk to me. He was a very young man with a thin, clean-shaven face, which gave him a boyish look. He was too weary to stand straight and too weary to talk more than a few jerky words. He leaned up against the wall of the miner's cottage, and passed a hand over his face and eyes, and said:

"I'm darned tired. It was the hell of a fight. We fought to a finish, and when we had no more bombs of our own we picked up Heine's bombs and used those." [The Canadians call their enemy Heine and not Fritz.] "Heine was at least three times as strong as us, and we gave him hell. It was hand-to-hand fighting—rifles, bombs, bayonets, butt-ends, any old way of killing a man, and we killed a lot. But he broke our left flank, and things were bloody in the centre. He had one of his strong points there, and swept us with machine-gun fire. My fellows went straight for it, and a lot of them got wiped out. But we got on top of it and through the wire, and held the trench beyond until Heine came down with swarms of bombers."

This young Canadian officer was stricken by the loss of many of his men. "The best crowd that any fellow could command," and he had been through indescribable things under enormous shell-fire, and he had had no sleep for days and nights, and could not sleep now for thinking of things. But he smiled grimly once or twice when he reckoned up the enemy's losses. The remembrance of the German dead he had seen seemed like strong wine to his soul. "We made them pay," was his summing up of the battle. The nightmare of it all was still heavy on him, and he spoke with a quiet fierceness about the enemy's losses and the things he had endured in a way which would scare poor, simple souls who think that war is a fine picturesque business.

A senior officer of a battalion on the flank of his was a different type of man—a very tall, strong-featured man of middle age, like an English squire of the old style, with a fine smiling light in his eyes, in spite of all he had been through, and with a vivid way of speech that would not come fast enough to say splendid things about his men, to describe the marvellous way in which they had fought in frightful conditions, to praise first one and then another for the things they had done when things were at their worst. He had been addressing some of the survivors of this battle when I came upon him, and I saw them march away, straightening themselves up before this officer of theirs, and proud because he was pleased with them. He thanked them for one thing above all, and that was for the gallant way in which, after all their fighting, they had gone out to fetch in their dead and wounded, so that not one wounded man lay out there to die or to be taken prisoner, and the dead were brought back for burial. He said a word, too, for Heine, as they call him. The Germans had not sniped or machine-gunned the stretcher-bearers, but had sent their own men out on the same mission too. That was after the battle, and there was no surrendering while the fighting was on.

This officer's story was as wonderful as anything I have heard in this war. And the man himself was wonderful, for he had had no sleep for six days and nights, and had suffered the fearful strain of his responsibility for many men's lives; yet now, when I met him straight from all that, he was bright-eyed and his mind was as clear as a bell, and the emotion that surged through him was well controlled. He described the things I have attempted to describe before—the fortified streets and houses of Lens, which make it one great fortress, tunnelled from end to end with exits into concrete forts two yards thick in cement, in the ruined cottages. On the morning of our attack the enemy was expecting it, and within a minute and a half of our barrage put down his own barrage with terrific intensity. So there were the Canadians between two walls of high explosives, and it was between that inferno that they fought in the great death struggle. For the Canadians had already advanced towards the enemy's line, and in greater numbers—three times as great—he had advanced to ours, and the two forces met on the barren stretch of earth crossed by twisted trenches, which for a time had been No Man's Land.

While the battalion on the left was heavily engaged fighting with rifles and bombs until their ammunition gave out, and then with bayonets and butt-ends, the battalion on the right was working southward and eastward to the northern outskirts of Lens. They came up at once against the fortress houses from which machine-gun and rifle fire poured out. The Canadians in small parties tried to surround these places, but many were swept down. Some of them rushed close to the walls of one house, which was a bastion of the northern defences of Lens, and were so close that the machine-guns, through slits in the walls, could not fire at them. They even established a post behind it and beyond it, quite isolated from the rest of their men, but clinging to their post all day. The enemy dropped bombs upon them through the loopholes and sand-bagged windows, fired rifle-grenades at them, and tried to get machine-guns at them, but there were always a few men left to hold the post, until at last, when the line withdrew elsewhere, they were recalled. One house near here, into which a party of Canadians forced their way, was a big arsenal. Its cellars were crammed with shells and piled boxes of bombs. In other cellars were dead bodies, and the stench of corruption mingled with the stale vapour of gas. Down in one of these vaults a young Canadian soldier stayed with his officer, who was badly wounded, and could not leave him, but waited until night, when he carried the officer back to safety.

Before that night came there were great German counter-attacks. Masses of men carrying nothing but stick-bombs, which they had slung around them, advanced down the communication-trenches and flung these things at the Canadians of the left battalion, who were fighting out in the open, and in another communication-trench with the right battalion. The enemy walked over the piled corpses of his own dead before he could drive back the Canadians, but by repeated storming parties he did at last force them to give way and retreat down the trench to gain the support of their comrades of the other battalion, which had not been so hard pressed. These came to the rescue, and for a long time held the German grenadiers at bay. The fighting was fierce and savage on both sides.

At last, weakened by their losses and with failing stores of ammunition, these two battalions were given the order to retire to a trench farther back, and the survivors of the most desperate

action in Canadian history withdrew, still fighting, and established blocks in the communication-trenches down which the enemy was bombing, so that they could not pass those points to the line upon which here on the north of Lens the Canadians had fallen back. Southward there had been no withdrawal, and other battalions had forced their way forward a good distance, shutting up that entrance to the city and getting down into the deep tunnels, over which there howled the unceasing fire of the German heavies. Our own guns were hard at work, and I have already told how the Prussians were destroyed in the square of Lens by 12-inch shells and shrapnel.

I could write more, but I have written enough. The Canadians never had fighting so hard as this, but the losses they have inflicted upon the enemy have made Lens a Prussian tomb, so that its tunnels are death vaults. The heart of the city is still a fortress, and the new garrison is still strong there, so that, like Thiépval, which held out for many weeks after it was enclosed on three sides, Lens will not fall in a night. But as a dwelling-place for German troops it is a city of abomination and dreadfulness.

XIV

THE AGONY OF ARMENTIÈRES

SEPTEMBER 15

THE harvests of France and Flanders have been gathered in, and already the plough, driven by men too old to fight or boys too small and young, or by peasant women whose men are somewhere near St.-Quentin or Verdun, is turning up the stubble in the fields and making a brown landscape where three weeks ago it was all gold and bronze.

The trees are turning brown also, deepening to a reddish tint in all the woods between Boulogne and the battlefields, where there are only dead trees. Round about Poperinghe the trailing hops have been pulled down from their poles, already stripped in places by last month's gale, and the sticks are all bare. Outside the wooden huts built on the edge of war by refugees from Ypres and shell-broken villages, Flemish women sit with the hops in their laps and in great baskets beside them, and British soldiers on the march with dry throats exchange

remarks about the good beer which they may never have the luck to drink. White cloud-mountains which turn black and threaten a deluge between bursts of sunshine are banked up above the russet foliage and the brown earth and the old black windmills which wave their arms across the landscape, and in the wind there is a smell of moisture and mist, and the first faint sniff of rotting leaves. It is the autumn touch—the autumn touch of a war in which some of us have seen four harvests gathered into French barns and four winters come. It makes one feel a bit sad, that thought. It puts an autumn touch for a second or two into the souls of men coming back from leave as I came back with some of them two days ago.

By day the sky out here is full of interest, for one cannot go anywhere near the lines without seeing that aerial activity which has become intense and fierce lately. Yesterday I saw a great flight of our aeroplanes over the dead town of Armentières. There were between twenty and thirty of them making their way over the German lines, and the enemy hated the sight of them. His anti-aircraft guns got to work savagely and bursts of black shrapnel filled the sky all about those steady wings, but did not bring them down. He hated other aircraft watching over his lines—a long line of kite-balloons, "clustered like grapes," as some one described them, in our side of the sky. They were as white as snow when the sun touched them, and made tempting targets for long-range guns. Some German gunners registered on one of them nearest to Armentières, and I saw a terrific burst of yellow smoke, so close to it that it seemed like a hit. But the smoke cleared, and the kite balloon stayed calmly on its wire, and there was no parachute demonstration by our observers in the basket. The drone of our aeroplanes and the reports of German anti-aircraft guns made the only noise in Armentières—that and the sound of two men's footsteps as I and another walked through the streets of that town which is dead.

It is a queer thing to walk through a big town out of which all life has gone, and queer to me especially in Armentières, because I knew it not long ago when there were many women and girls about its streets, and when one could take one's choice of tea-shops—though only eighteen hundred yards away from the German line—and get an excellent little dinner in more than one restaurant. One could have one's hair cut and a shampoo

to the musical accompaniment of field-batteries outside the town, and buy most of the things a man wants in the simple life of war (except peace) in shops kept by brave Frenchwomen—women too brave and too rash because they lived within 1800 yards of the enemy's line as though it were eighteen miles. Armentières was a modern little manufacturing town for lace and thread, with neat red-brick houses kept by well-to-do people who liked good comfortable furniture, and put a piano into their front parlour and a little marble Venus and other knick-knacks of art on the drawing-room table as a proof of good taste above the mere sordid interest of money-making.

For a long time in the war that town has been known to British soldiers who have passed it on their way to Plug Street as "Armentears." They made friends with some of the girls in the tea-shops, and said "Hallo, granny! Tray bong!" to old ladies who sold them picture post cards. Now it is a town of tears to any people who once lived there. The tea-shops have been smashed to bits and the women and the girls have gone, unless their bodies lie in the cellars beneath the ruins. The agony of Armentières began at the end of June, when the enemy first began to bombard it with systematic violence, and though there is no life left in it the broken houses are still battered by more shells when the enemy's gunners have nothing else to do. When I walked through its streets yesterday I was the witness of the horror that had passed. The German bombardment began quite suddenly one night, and the old women and the girls and the children were in their beds. They rushed down into their cellars, not for the first time, because during nearly three years of war stray shells had often come into the town. But never like this. These were not random shells, scattered here and there. They came with a steady and frightful violence into every part of the town, sweeping down street after street, blowing houses to dust, knocking the fronts off the shops, playing fantastic, horrible tricks of choosing and leaving, as shell-fire does in any town of this size. There were gas-shells among the high explosives, and their poison filtered down into the cellars. A fire broke out in one of the squares beyond the old church of St.-Vaast, and the houses were gutted by flames, which licked high above their roofless walls.

The fires were out when I walked there yesterday, and the church of St.-Vaast was surrounded by its own ruins—great

blocks of masonry hurled from its dome and buttresses amidst a mass of broken glass. Inside there is a tragic ruin, and rows of cane chairs lie in wild chaos among the broken pillars and the piled stones. The pipes of the great organ have been flung out of their framework, but curiously the side altars, with the figures of apostles and saints, and the central figure of the Sacred Heart, are hardly touched, and stand unscathed amidst this great destruction. There is nothing new in all this. For three years I have been walking through destroyed towns and villages, but it has the grim interest of recent history, and Armentières is the scene of a tragedy to its civilian population which makes one's heart ache with a new revolt against this monstrous cruelty of war upon the innocent and the helpless.

It was easy to see what had happened during those days and nights of terror some weeks ago. I looked into the blown-out fronts of little shops and houses, and saw how everything had been abandoned in that rush of women and children to the cellars. In spite of the wreckage of the upper stories and of the walls about them, some of the rooms were intact. Here were the remains of an estaminet, with its cash-box on the bar counter, and games such as soldiers love—dominoes and darts, and quoits and bagatelle, set out as though for an evening's entertainment. Here was a chemist's shop, with many bottles unbroken on the shelves, though most of the house was blown across the street. I looked through a hole in the wall to a drawing-room, with a piano, standing amid a litter of broken furniture, as though some madman had wreaked his fury on the sofa and chairs.

But it was in the cellars that the pitiful drama had been—in those cellars down which I peered wondering whether any poor bodies lay there still. The shells had pierced down to some of the women hiding in them. Poison-gas came to choke some of them. Rescue parties of our R.A.M.C. went into Armentières immediately to get the poor creatures away, and risked their lives a score of times on each journey they made. It is an amazing thing that even then, in spite of their terror and their agony and their wounds, many of the old women could hardly be made to leave the town, and clung desperately to their homes, though these had fallen down on top of them.

Outside Armentières yesterday I met one of the R.A.M.C. lads who had helped in this rescue work—he has been given a

Military Medal for it—and he told me of his trouble with two old ladies when things were at their worst. Neither had a rag of clothing on except the blankets he wrapped round them as they lay on stretchers; but when his attention wandered from them, owing to shells which burst close to the ambulance, one of these old dames scrambled up and ran off naked down the street. He went after her, and on his return found that the other old lady had given him the slip.

He had astounding experiences, this Wessex boy who is an expert in bandaging wounds, and through many days of dreadfulness and many nights he worked in Armentières under heavy fire, and did not turn a hair. He was such a Mark Tapley that when everything was falling about him and Hell was let loose he became more and more cheerful and refused to take things seriously.

"I don't think I ever laughed so much," he told me yesterday. "I don't know how it was, but I couldn't help seeing the comical side of it all, in spite of the ghastly sights." I suppose this boy's sense of humour was touched by the monstrous idiocy of the shell-fire, which produced effects like those on a music-hall stage when the funny man breaks all the crockery and brings the roof down over his head. He laughed like anything when he was shelled out of his makeshift dressing-station on one side of the street, and had to establish his quarters on the other side of another street.

"How's it going, my lad!" asked his officer, who came to visit the aid post.

"Well, sir," he answered, "it's rather hotter than the last place, except for direct hits."

He laughed "like anything" again when a shell came through the kitchen and smashed up the stove, and failed to kill an old lady, already covered with bruises but very talkative. He laughed again when they had to pack up traps in a hurry, with the stiff body of a small dead child on the top of the kit and a barrage down the street.

"This is the funniest old show I ever did see," was the comment of the boy from Wessex, and certainly, when one comes to think of it, it is a funny thing that such things should happen in this civilized world of ours and in this Christian age. But the boy from Wessex, and others like him, did not let their sense of humour get the better of their pity or their work of

rescue. They crawled out and dragged in the bodies of dead or wounded people.

Down below in the cellars was a crowd of poor people, mostly women and girls, and when the shell-fire was at its height their wailing and their prayers were rather troublesome to the Wessex boy and his comrades upstairs bandaging the wounded. The R.A.M.C. men, at most deadly risk to themselves, managed to clear most of the cellars, carrying out the people on shutters, and taking them away in ambulances to hospitals. To one of these casualty clearing-stations was brought a boy of nineteen, who had been gassed. He was a life-long paralytic and wizened like an old man, and deaf and dumb. Nobody knew where he had come from or to whom he belonged, but he had one creature faithful to him. It was a small dog, who came on the stretcher with him, sitting on his chest. It watched close to him when he lay in the hospital, and went away with him, sitting on his chest again, when he was sent farther away to another clearing-station. This dog's fidelity to the paralysed boy, who was deaf and dumb and gassed, seems to men who have seen many sights of war and this agony in Armentières the most pitiful thing they know.

Yesterday, apart from the knocking of anti-aircraft guns and the drone of our planes, it was all quiet there, and I walked through the silent streets over the broken bricks and glass, and was startled by the utter death of the town. For this quietude and ruin of a place that one has seen full of life gives one a sinister sensation, and one is frightened by one's loneliness.

XV

THE BATTLE OF MENIN ROAD

SEPTEMBER 20

OUR troops attacked this morning before six o'clock on a wide front north and south of the Ypres-Menin road, and have gained important ground all along the line. It is ground from which during the past six weeks there has been that heroic and desperate fighting which I have described as best I could in my daily messages, giving even at the best only a vague idea of the difficulties encountered by those men of ours who made great sacrifices in great endeavours. It is the ground

which in the centre rises up through the sinister woodlands of Glencorse Copse and Inverness Wood to the high ground of Polygon Wood and the spurs of the Passchendaele Ridge, which form the enemy's long defensive barrier to the east of the Ypres salient. Until that high land was taken progress was difficult for our troops on the left across the Steenbeek, as the enemy's guns could still hold commanding positions. The ground over which our men have swept this morning had been assaulted again and again by troops who ignored their losses, and attacked with a most desperate and glorious courage, yet failed to hold what they gained for a time, because their final goal was attained with weakened forces after most fierce and bloody fighting. The Empire knows who those men were—the old English county regiments, who never fought more gallantly; the Scots, who only let go of their forward positions under overwhelming pressure and annihilating fire; the Irish divisions, who suffered the most supreme ordeal, and earned new and undying honour by the way they endured the fire of many guns for many days. As long as history lasts, the name of these woods, from which most of the trees have been swept, and of these bogs and marshes which lie about them, will be linked with the memory of those brave battalions who fought through them again and again. They are not less to be honoured than those who with the same courage, just as splendid, attacked once more, over the same tracks, past the same death-traps, and achieved success. By different methods, by learning from what the first men had suffered, this last attack has not as yet been high in cost, and we hold what the enemy has used all his strength and cunning to prevent us getting. He used much cunning and poured up great reserves of men and guns to smash our assaulting lines. For the first time on July 31 we came up against his new and fully prepared system of defence, and discovered the power of it. Abandoning the old trench system which we could knock to pieces with artillery, he made his forward positions without any definite line, and built a large number of concrete blockhouses, so arranged in depth that they defended each other by enfilade fire, and so strong that nothing but a direct hit from one of our heavier shells would damage it. And a direct hit is very difficult on a small mark like one of those concrete houses, holding about ten to twenty men at a minimum, and fifty to sixty in their largest.

These little garrisons were mostly machine-gunners and picked men specially trained for outpost work, and they could inflict severe damage on an advancing battalion, so that the forward lines passing through and beyond them would be spent and weak. Then behind in reserve lay the German "Stoss-truppen," specially trained also for counter-attacks, which were launched in strong striking forces against our advanced lines after all their struggle and loss. Those blockhouses proved formidable things—hard nuts to crack, as the soldiers said who came up against them. There are scores of them whose names will be remembered through a lifetime by men of many battalions, and they cost the lives of many brave men. Beck House and Borry Farm belong to Irish history. Wurst Farm and Winnipeg, Bremen Redoubt and Gallipoli, Iberian and Delva Farm, are strongholds round which many desperate little battles, led by young subalterns or sergeants, have taken place on the last day of July and on many days since. English and Scots have taken turns in attacking and defending such places as Fitzclarence Farm, Northampton Farm, and Black Watch Corner in the dreadful region of Inverness Copse and Glencorse Wood. To-day the hard nut of the concrete blockhouse has been cracked by a new method of attack and by a new assault, planned with great forethought, and achieved so far with high success.

Among the troops engaged on the 2nd Army front were the Australians and South-Africans, Welsh and Scottish battalions, and many of the old English regiments, including the Cheshires, Warwicks, Worcesters, Staffords, Wiltshires, Gloucesters, Berkshires, Oxford and Bucks, York and Lancashires, Sherwood Foresters, and Rifle Brigade. The Divisions to which they belonged were, from north to south, the 2nd Australians, 1st Australians, the 23rd and 41st (with the 21st and 23rd in reserve), the 39th, the 19th, the 30th, 14th, and 8th.

I should like to give the full details of the preparations which have made this success possible and the methods by which some at least of the terrors of the blockhouse have been laid low, but it cannot yet be done, and it is enough now that good results have been attained. One thing was against us as usual last night. After several fine days the weather turned bad again, and last night many men must have looked up at the sky, groaned, and said, "Just our luck." At half-past ten it

began to rain heavily, and all through the night there was a steady drizzle. It was awful to think of that ground about the woodlands, already full of water-holes and bogs, becoming more and more of a quagmire as the time drew near when our men have to rise from the mud and follow the barrage across the craters. All through the night our heavy guns were slogging, and through the dark wet mist there was the blurred light of their flashes. Before the dawn a high wind was raging at thirty miles an hour across Flanders, and heavy water-logged clouds were only 400 feet above the earth. How could our airmen see. When the attack began they could not see, even when they flew as low as 200 feet. They could see nothing but smoke, which clung low to the battlefields, and they could only guess the whereabouts of German batteries. Later, when some progress had been made at most points of the attacking line, the sky cleared a little, blue spaces showed through the black storm-clouds, and there were gleams of sun striking aslant the mists.

This sky on the salient was a strange vision, and I have seen nothing like it since the war began. It was filled with little black specks like midges, but each midge was a British aeroplane flying over the enemy's lines. The enemy tried to clear the air of them, and his anti-aircraft guns were firing wildly, so that all about them were puffs of black shrapnel. Behind, closely clustered, were our kite-balloons, like snow-clouds where they were caught by the light, staring down over the battle, and in wide semicircles about the salient our heavy guns were firing ceaselessly with dull, enormous hammer-strokes, followed by the shrill cry of travelling shells making the barrage before our men, and having blockhouses for their targets and building walls of flying steel between the enemy and our attacking troops. In the near distance were the strafed woods of old battle-grounds like the Wytschaete Ridge and Messines, with their naked gallows-trees all blurred in the mist.

Our men had lain out all night in the rain before the attack at something before six. They were wet through to the skin, but it is curious that some of them whom I saw to-day were surprised to hear it had been raining hard. They had other things to think about. But some of them did not think at all. Tired out in mind and body under the big nervous strain which is there, though they may be unconscious of it, they

slept. "I was wakened by a friend just before we went over," said one of them. The anxiety of the officers was intense for the hours to pass before the enemy should get a hint of the movement. It seemed that in one part of the line he did guess that something was in the wind and in the mist. This was on the line facing Glencorse Wood. An hour or two before the attack he put over a heavy barrage, but most of it missed the heads of the battalions. There were many casualties, but the men stood firm, never budging, and making no sound. They all thought that some of their comrades must have been badly caught, but, as far as I can find, it did not do great damage.

All along the line the experience of the fighting was broadly the same. Apart from local details and difficulties, the ground was not quite so bad as had been expected, though bad enough, being greasy and boggy after the rain, but not impassable. The shell-holes were water-logged, and they were dangerously deep for badly wounded men who might fall in, but for the others there was generally a way round over ground which would hold, and our assaulting waves who led the advance were lightly clad, and could go at a fair pace after the barrage. "I saw wounded men fall in the shell-holes," said a Warwickshire lad to-day, "and God knows how they got out again, unless the stretcher-bearers came up quick, as most of them did; but as for me, I had lain in a shell-hole all night up to the waist in mud, and I was careful to keep out of them." The barrage ahead of them was terrific—the most appalling fence of shells that has ever been placed before advancing troops in this war. All our men describe it as wonderful. "Beautiful" is the word they use, because they know what it means in safety to them.

In the direction of Polygon Wood the plan of attack seems to have worked like clockwork. The Australians moved forward behind the barrage stage by stage, through Westhoek and Nonne Boschen, and across the Hanebeek stream on their left, with hardly a check, in spite of the German blockhouses scattered over this country. In those blockhouses the small garrisons of picked troops had been demoralized, as any human beings would be, by the enormous shell-fire which had been flung around them. Some, but not all, it seems, of the blockhouses had been smashed, and in those still standing the

German machine-gunners got their weapons to work with a burst or two of fire, but then, seeing our troops upon them, were seized with fear, and made signs of surrender. At nine o'clock this morning the good news came back that the Australians were right through Glencorse Wood. Later messages showed that our troops were fighting their way into Polygon Wood. They swept over the strong points at Black Watch Corner, Northampton Farm, and Carlisle Farm. There was stiff fighting round a blockhouse called Anzac Corner, east of the Hanebeek stream, and it was necessary to organize two flank attacks and work round it before the enemy machine-gun fire could be silenced by bombs. In another case near here the enemy came out of a blockhouse ready to attack, but when they saw our men swarming up, they lost heart and held up their hands. It is difficult to know how many prisoners were taken here in these woods and strong points. The men's estimates vary enormously, some speaking of scores and others of hundreds.

All this time the enemy's artillery reply was not exceptionally heavy, and, though it was prompt to come after the first S O S signals went up from his lines, it was erratic and varied very much in the success of our counter-battery work, which all through the night and for days past has been smothering his guns. South of the attack in Glencorse Copse and Polygon Wood the assault in Inverness Copse and Shrewsbury Forest, across the bog-lands round the Dumbarton Lakes, was made by English battalions, including the Queen's, the East and West Kents, the Northumberland Fusiliers, Sherwood Foresters, the King's Royal Rifles, and the West Riding battalions. It was the vilest ground, low-lying and flooded, and strewn with broken trees and choked with undergrowth, but the troops here kept up a good pace, and flung themselves upon the blockhouses which stood in their way. At an early hour our men were reported to be on a ridge south-east of Inverness Copse and going strong towards Veldhoek. The enemy's barrage came down too late, and one officer, who was wounded by a shell-splinter, led his men, 160 of them, to their first position with only nine casualties.

Most of our losses to-day were from machine-gun fire out of the blockhouses, and that varied very much at different parts of the line. There was some trouble at Het Pappotje Farm in

this way, where a party of German machine-gunners put up a desperate resistance, shutting themselves in behind steel doors before they were routed out by a bombing fight. Southward from a strong point called Groenenburg, or "Green Bug" Farm, to Opaque Wood by the Ypres—Comines Canal, the attack by the Cheshires, Wiltshires, Warwicks, Staffords, and Gloucesters was successful, though the enemy still holds out up to the time I write in Hessian Wood, where he is defending himself in a group of blockhouses against the Welsh Regiment and Royal Welsh Fusiliers.

I have dealt so far with the centre of the attack, and I know very little as to the fighting on the north by the 5th Army, except that the Highlanders, London Territorials, Lancashire and Liverpool battalions, and Scots and South-Africans have swept past a whole system of blockhouses, like Beck House and Borry Farm, running up through Gallipoli, Kansas Cross, and Wurst Farm, across the Langemarck—Zonnebeke road. All through the morning our lightly wounded men came filtering down to the safer places in the Ypres salient and then to the quiet fields behind, and they were in grand spirits in spite of the mud which caked them and the smart of their wounds. Some of them were brought down on the trolley trains, which go almost as far as the battle-line, and some in open buses, and some by German prisoners, but there were many Germans among the wounded—some of them with very ghastly wounds, and these took their place with ours and mingled with them in the dressing-stations, and were given the same treatment. Our wounded told some strange tales of their experiences, but there was no moan among them, whatever they had suffered.

One man of the Cheshires described to me how he saw a German officer run out of a dug-out, which had been a blockhouse blown in at each end by our heavy shell-fire, and make for another one which still stood intact. With some of his comrades, our man chased him, and there was a great fight in the second blockhouse before the survivors surrendered, among them the officer, who gave to my friend a big china pipe and a case full of cigars as souvenirs. He was killed afterwards by one of his own men, who sniped him as he was walking back to our lines. In another strong point there was a great and terrible fight. The Prussian garrison refused to surrender, and

a party of ours fought them until they were destroyed. "It was more lively than Wytschaete," said a man who was in this fight. "It was less tame-like, and the Fritzes put up a better show." They fought hard round Prince's House and Jarrock's Farm and Pioneer House, not far from Hollebeke Château.

The prisoners I saw to-day were shaken men. Most of them were young fellows of twenty-one, belonging to the 1916 class, and there were none of the youngest boys among them. But they were white-faced and haggard, and looked like men who had passed through a great terror, which indeed was their fate. They belonged mostly to the 207th Prussian Division, and had suffered before the battle from our great shell-fire, which had caused many casualties among their reliefs and ration parties. Many other prisoners belonged to the 121st Division. I can only give this glimpse or two of the crowded scenes and the many details of to-day's battle. To-morrow there will be time perhaps to write more, giving a deeper insight into this day of good success, which is cheering after so much desperate fighting—over the same fields, although never to so far a goal.

SEPTEMBER 21

IN spite of many German counter-attacks yesterday and many vain and costly attempts to counter-attack to-day, we hold all the ground gained by our men yesterday, except at one or two strong points, after their victorious progress. This morning when I went again among the men who have been fighting—there was a blue sky over the rags and tatters of the City of Ypres, and behind the tall, solitary tree-stumps on the ridge that goes up to Polygon Wood by way of Glencorse Copse, and all the air was filled with the song of many aeroplanes—all that I learned yesterday about the battle was made more certain by the narratives of these young soldiers, who are proud and glad of what they call a real good show. The wounded men walking down over the wide stretch of fields, which are still under gun-fire, weak with loss of blood, suffering the first pain of their wounds, and shaken by their experiences under shells and machine-gun fire, spoke with a quiet enthusiasm of the day's success, and said "It was easy" behind such a colossal barrage as our guns rolled in front of them. Some of

them in their eagerness went too fast for the barrage in order to chase the enemy, and I have met Australians here and there and some men of the Welsh Regiment, who fought farther south, wounded because they ran in front of the barrage-lines, and were caught in our shell-splinters. But that was a rare episode, and along the whole line of attack the men followed the moving walls of shells, vast shells that fling up masses of earth like suburban villas, and the smaller shells that fell like confetti, all glinting in the wet mist, and felt sure that the enemy in front of them would have lost all his fight when they reached his hiding-places, if any lived. Many Germans died on that ground, so that the shell-holes between the block-houses are wet graves in which their bodies lie, and many of the blockhouses which resisted so long in former attacks are smashed, or at least so battered that the garrisons inside were dazed and demoralized by the fearful hammering at their walls.

There was a broad belt of death across that mile deep of woods and ridges and barren fields, but here and there, as I have already told, men stayed alive in the concrete houses and fought with their machine-guns to the last, and even kept sniping from shell-holes in which they had escaped, up to the time our troops reached them. They were brave men, most of them, for it needs great courage to show any fighting spirit after such a fury of gun-fire, and 50 per cent. of our prisoners are wounded, as I have seen myself, and the others are haggard and spent after their frightful adventure. An hour or two ago I met a column of them on the road, marching down slowly through a ruined village, and staring hollow-eyed at all the movement of our troops, at all the transport behind our lines, at all our whistling, busy Tommies, who glance back at them without any malice now that the battle is over. In a dressing-station a young wounded German sprang to his feet as I came in, and said, "Good day, sir," very politely, but the pallor of his face was that of a dead man. The German officers who are prisoners show the same kind of eagerness to salute, which is a rare thing for them, and I hear that they do not disguise that yesterday was a day of great defeat for themselves, and of great victory for us. The completeness and quickness of it staggered them, and they speak of our barrage-fire as an awful phenomenon that has undone all their plans and destroyed the new method of defence which they believed could save them

to the end. As wounded men or prisoners they see things darkly, and we should be deep in folly if we believed that all the enemy's strength of resistance is destroyed. But at least this is clear after yesterday, that the new German method of holding his lines lightly by small garrisons in blockhouses, with reserves behind for counter-attacks, has broken down, and by reverting to the old system of strong front lines he would suffer again as he suffered in the Somme under the ferocity of our artillery.

The German officers have hard words to say about their Higher Command which has led them into this tragedy, and their own pride is broken. Yesterday the reserve divisions, which were brought up in buses and then assembled in places near our new front, to be flung against our advanced lines, had a dreadful time, and must have suffered great losses. After the rain of the night and the mist of the morning, the weather cleared in time for our airmen to go out reconnoitring, as I saw them in swarms in yesterday's sky, and they were quick to report the massing of the enemy. Our guns were quick to fire at these human targets. These counter-attacks developed several times against the English and Highland troops, who were fighting across the Zonnebeke—Langemarck road, north-west of the Gravenstafel and Abraham Heights, at a place called the Schreiboom, north of Langemarck. Some of the Rifle Brigade and King's Royal Rifles, with other light-infantry troops, failed at first to get a certain trench, and very hard fighting took place during the day in a pocket with desperate courage. At the same time the Highlanders south of them were fighting very hard also round about the blockhouses by Rose House, Pheasant Farm, and Quebec Farm beyond the Pilkem Ridge, into which I looked a week or two ago, when things were quiet on the line. The Highlanders were driven back for a while, and the enemy's counter-attacks were made in strong force at about ten o'clock in the morning, and several times later. But they were broken up each time by the rifle-fire of the Scottish troops, and by our field-batteries.

Large numbers of the enemy were killed here in our first attack and afterwards. Besides the artillery, a heavy bombardment was made before the men went out by trench-mortars, which raked a small area of shell-holes so thoroughly that the German snipers in them were destroyed, and an important

trench was taken by the Scots with hardly any casualties. A good deal more than 100,000 rounds of shells must have gone over from the guns before the battle, and afterwards the German storm troops who tried to recover the ground were smothered with fire. Six times they came on with much determination, and six times their waves were broken up. Some London Territorials had to repel part of the assaulting waves, after a gallant struggle for their objectives, and one young officer among them earned special honour by gathering a company of men together and leading them against the advancing enemy, whom they scattered with bombs and rifles.

Most of the Germans here in this district round Wurst Farm, east of Winnipeg, were men of the 36th and 208th Divisions, and were a mixture of Prussians and Poles, who seem to have been stout-hearted fellows. Their local reserves were quickly exhausted, and in the afternoon, when they threw in further reserves, these were broken up in the same way. A frightful fate met a German division which was brought up in the afternoon near Roulers to be hurled against the Londoners and Highlanders. Our guns broke up their columns, and when they rallied and re-formed, broke them again. Our aeroplanes flew low over them, strafing them with machine-gun fire, and at intervals gas clouded about them, so that they had to put on their masks, if they had time to put them on before they fell, and marched blindly forward to another doom, for some of those who came within range were shot down by the London men, little fellows, some of them, with the Cockney accent which makes me homesick for the Fulham Road when I hear it along the roads of Flanders, but with big, brave hearts. Three of the German battalions deployed and drove against the Highlanders at Delva Farm and Rose House, and fought so hard that they could only be driven back when the Highlanders rallied, and at eight o'clock in the evening swept them out and away. Strong counter-attacks were made between six and seven in the evening in the neighbourhood of Hill 37 and the country round Bremen Redoubt, against the King's Liverpools, where the South-African Scots held their line.

There were a great many blockhouses in this district, some of them damaged and some still intact, and in those undamaged forts little parties of men, who fired their machine-guns to the

last moment before death or surrender. Hill 37 was a hard place to attack, as the Irish found it, and here Lancashire men fought their way up and round in spite of the waves of machine-gun bullets that swept the ground about them. The Bremen Redoubt, which had been so costly to the Irishmen on July 31, was carried by the South-Africans in a fine assault, while Scottish troops were gaining other strong points and drawing tight nets round any blockhouse from which came any fire. Out of these places, in all that part of the line, many prisoners were taken, and they made their way down anxiously through their own shell-fire, which was barraging these fields. A great party of Germans, white-faced and afraid, were found in the long galleries running out of a fortified place called Schuler Farm.

South of all this the Australians were fighting in the centre of yesterday's great attack where the ground rises to the foul heights of Polygon Wood. The Australian lads were in their most perfect form. They had had some rest since the hard, bad days at Bullecourt and in the dreadful valley of Noreuil, where I went to see them outside the Quéant—Drocourt line. Since then I had seen them in the harvest-fields of France, in the market squares of Flemish towns, along the dusty roads which lead up to the Front. Always I felt it good to see those easy-going fellows in their flap hats, so lithe, so clean-cut, so fresh. It was an honour to get a salute from them now and then, for they are not great at that sort of thing, and one could see with half an eye that they have not lost any of their quality since some of them fought their great epic at Helles and Suvla Bay, and afterwards at Pozières gained and held their ground under months of great shell-fire, and then at Bullecourt fought with the grim endurance of men who will not yield to any kind of hammering if their pride is in the job. They are boys, many of them, and simple-looking fellows who were not cut to the model of barrack-room soldiers. They have a wildish gipsy look when one sees them camped in the fields, and free-and-easy manners in the village estaminets. When I heard they were going to attack Polygon Wood I knew that we should get it, if human courage could have the say, for the Australians are not easily denied if they set their mind on a thing, and for all their boyishness—though they have middle-aged fellows among them too—they have a grim passion in them at such

times. Yet they are free-and-easy always, even on the battlefield, and a bit impatient of checks and restraints. Knowing them, and the heart and soul of them, one of their commanding officers arranged a method of preventing them from getting bored with the long strain of a two hours' wait, which was ordered when they should have gained their first objective. He sent up to them by the carrying parties bundles of the previous day's papers, all the picture papers especially, and large quantities of cigarettes. The idea worked beautifully, and it was the strangest thing that has happened in any great battle. The Australian lads got at the papers, and on the ground which they had just captured spread them out and studied the news of the day and smoked their cigarettes with quiet enjoyment, while ahead of them rolled a stupendous barrage, with thousands of heavy shells that came screaming over their heads from our guns behind them, answered by other shells that came the other way, and burst farther back on the battlefield. So they were seen by one of our airmen, who was surprised by what he saw.

The going had been pretty bad before then, as I was told to-day by some of the men whom I met slightly wounded along the Menin road. The enemy seemed to smell danger in the night and put over a heavy barrage just before the attack started. It was on the tail of the Australians, and might have demoralized them if they had not been so high in heart. They got away in good order, and kept going to keep pace with the travelling storm of shells which broke before them. One queer thing happened near Clapham Junction. The enemy had apparently planned a raid with "flammenwerfer," or flame-jets as we call these devilish engines, at the very time of the attack, and they were met by the Australian shock of assault, and fell before it. While some of the Australians worked round Glencorse Copse and Nonne Boschen or Nuns' Wood, others fought up by Westhoek across the Hanebeek towards the post called by a curious coincidence Anzac Corner. After heavy fighting for a little while at one of the blockhouses the Australian flag was planted at Anzac Corner and waves there still. In Nonne Boschen the ground was marshy and encumbered with fallen trees, but the boys struggled through somehow, and then started for the Polygon Wood, where there is no wood, as there seldom is in these places when our artillery has done its work,

but only some blasted trunks and stakes. In Glencorse Wood and round about it there were a good many Germans, and they fought hard. Fifty of them were killed in hand-to-hand fighting, or fighting at close quarters, and a blockhouse on the north-west of the wood, where the garrison would not surrender, but kept his machine-guns going, was taken by a bombing attack. So after a two hours' wait at the end of the first lap the Australians flung away their cigarettes and the assaulting waves passed on to the ridge of Polygon Wood. They could not take all the line they had been asked to take in the first attempt, and were checked on the right by machine-gun fire. So they dug in on a crescent, which had its right ear somewhere by Carlisle Farm to the north of Black Watch Corner, until supports came up to make good their losses on the way, and they were able to go forward and straighten out. After that the counter-attacks began. All of them were broken up by artillery-fire, and when one of the German divisions was flung in, the only men who reached our lines were those who tried to escape from the barrage which our guns put over their assembly position. I should like to give a fuller history than I did yesterday about the taking of Inverness Copse and the bogs of the Dumbarton Lakes, and the tangled ground of Shrewsbury Forest, but I have no time, as the wires wait, except to pay a tribute to the men who fought there over most difficult country, crowded with blockhouses, and under severe fire from the enemy's guns. Men from Surrey and Kent, from the Midlands, from Wales, from the North, the battalions of the 8th and 14th Divisions, all fought and won with equal courage and success.

SEPTEMBER 23

THE enthusiasm of the troops who fought in Thursday's battle of the Menin road is good enough proof that they achieved success that morning without those great losses which take the heart out of victory. All the men I have seen are convinced that the enemy's losses are heavy. Not so much in the actual attack, where he held his blockhouse system with small garrisons, as afterwards, when he tried to counter-attack.

I have already put on record some of the attempts he made to regain ground on the afternoon of the battle. Yesterday and to-day he has continued his efforts with even more disastrous results to his unhappy troops. About midday yesterday a

German regiment was sent up in motor-omnibuses to a point behind the enemy's lines to make a new assault upon our positions in Polygon Wood. The three battalions then took to the road, and were seen very quickly by our observers. The artillery made that road a way of fire, and the German soldiers were caught in it and dispersed. Odd companies of them worked their way forward by other tracks, but lost themselves in the chaos of shell-craters, where other heavy shells burst among them. They were no longer battalions or companies, but a terror-stricken collection of individual soldiers, taking cover in holes and without guidance or command. An officer collected fifty of them and led them back to reorganize. He had no notion of what had happened to the rest of the regiment, except that it was broken and ineffective, in this wild turmoil of crater earth. He went forward again on reconnaissance, and walked into a body of Australians, who took him prisoner.

So it happened with another column at Zandvoorde. One of our aerial observers watched the long trail of men marching up the road and sent a message to the guns. They were the heavy guns which found the target with 9·2 shells and with twelve-inchers, which are monstrous and annihilating. Down there at Zandvoorde it must have been hell. We can only guess how many men were blown to pieces, and it is not a picture on which the imagination should care to linger. It was a bloody shambles.

Along the Menin road later in the day came another long column of marching men. They were men of the Sixteenth Bavarian Division, who had been sent up in urgent haste without knowledge of the ground, without maps, and with officers who seem to have had no definite instructions except to fling their men in an attack somehow and anyhow. Over their heads in the darkness under the stars flew a British aeroplane with a bomb of the heaviest kind. When our airman saw these hostile troops advancing, flying low like a great black bat he dropped his frightful thing on the head of the column. It burst with a deafening roar and scattered the leading company. Flying in the same sky-space as the big aeroplane was a number of other night raiders of ours. They also flew low above the marching troops, and all down the road dropped their explosives. Our guns added their help, and they fired many rounds down the Menin road, bracketing the ditches. It is a dreadful thing to walk along a road which is being "bracketed," and with

those birds of prey above them the Bavarians must have suffered the worst kind of horror. They did not get near to our lines with any counter-attack.

None of these counter-attacks has reached our lines near Polygon Ridge, which is the ground most wanted by the enemy, and the nearest seems to have been yesterday afternoon, when some of the Australian boys with whom I talked to-day saw the movement of men and the glint of bayonets in a little wood on an opposite spur. They saw the movement of men for a minute of two, and after that a fury of shells which fell into the wood and filled it with flame and smoke.

"I don't know how a mortal man could have lived through that," said one of these lads. "If any Fritz got out of that without being cracked he must have had the luck of Old Harry."

There were many of these Australian boys among whom I went to-day before they had cleaned themselves of the dirt of battle, and while they were still on fire with the emotion of their amazing adventure. Some of them had escaped only by enormous luck. I talked with one stretcher-bearer, a fine, big, bullet-headed fellow with an unshaven chin and a merry smile, who was astounded to find himself alive. He had spent the day and night bandaging wounded, and, with his mates, carrying them down to the dressing-station, a mile and more back. All the time he walked and worked with bursting shells about him. They knocked out several of his mates, but left him untouched. They killed two or three of the wounded on his stretchers going down, but did not scratch him. They blew up dug-outs just as he had gone out of them, and trenches through which he made his way. He was buried in earth flung up by heavy shells, and he fell many times into deep craters, and men dropped all round him, but to-day he still had a whole skin and a queer, lingering smile, in which there is a look of wonderment because of his escape.

An Australian officer, who was through the Dardanelles and the Somme and Bullecourt, a slim, small-sized Australian, with a delicate, clean-cut face, thoughtful and grave, with a fine light in his eyes, was helping a wounded lad on to a stretcher when a shell came over his head, killed the boy, but left the officer unscathed. It was this officer, this slight, delicate-looking man, who captured, with three lads, sixty men and a German battalion staff in their headquarter dug-outs below Polygon Wood.

"Where is your revolver?" he said to the captain. The German hesitated, and said: "You will shoot me if I fetch it." "I will shoot you if you don't," said the little Australian. And he meant what he said, as I could see by the set of his lips when he told me the tale. But the German captain handed over his revolver quietly, and his maps, which were very useful.

It was a wonderful scene to-day among all these Australian lads, who had just been relieved and were talking over the scenes of yesterday's history in small groups while they scraped off the mud and shaved before bits of broken mirror, and polished up German rifles and machine-guns and handled their souvenirs, found in the dug-outs and blockhouses. Many of them were stripped to the waist, some of them wore German caps, some of them slept like drugged men in spite of all the noise about them. After taking the first objective they had to wait for two hours before they went on, and there were queer scenes about the blockhouses and in the felled woods. They had found the German rations, and besides the sausages and bread and gallons of cold coffee in petrol-tins, which the boys shared among themselves, quantities of long, fat, and excellent cigars. Hundreds of Australians smoked these cigars while they waited for the barrage to lift, and when they went on again hundreds of them were still puffing them as they trudged on to Polygon Wood. They had a good day. I have met some of them, who said they enjoyed it, and would not have missed it for worlds. The excitement of it all kept them going. The battle-field was a wild pandemonium of men, and the imagination of people who have never seen war will hardly visualize such scenes, with lads laughing and smoking while others lay dead, with groups fighting and falling round blockhouses while others were eating German sausages and joking in captured emplacements, with stretcher-bearers carrying men back under heavy shell-fire and German prisoners dodging their own barrage-fire on their way to our lines. An Australian doctor had his arm smashed, but stayed among the boys, regardless of his own hurt. A V.C. officer of the Dardanelles was killed as he went back wounded on a stretcher. German wounded lay crying for help, and our men rescued them. So about Glencorse Wood and Polygon Wood human agony and the wild spirits of Australian youth, death, and the vitality of boyhood in the passion of a great adventure were queerly mixed, and one side

of this picture of war would be hopelessly untrue if it left out the other side.

One enthusiasm of the Australians was about the English soldiers who fought on their right, the Yorkshire boys and others who went through Inverness Copse. Again and again yesterday I heard them loud in praise of the Tommies.

"By gosh, they'll do for me! They went ahead in grand style. They couldn't be stopped anyhow, though they came up against a durned lot of machine-gun fire. They were just fine."

Far north of all this, above the Zonnebeke, were the Londoners of the 58th Division and the Highlanders of the 51st Division, and, as I have already written in previous messages, they had severe fighting and had to bear the brunt of great counter-attacks. The ground in front of the London Territorials was bad and difficult—bad because it was intersected with swamps and cut up by weeks of shell-fire, and horribly difficult because of a ridge rising up on the left to the German strong point of Wurst Farm.

The London boys swung left in order to attack Wurst Farm, and, avoiding a frontal assault, worked left-handed all the time till they reached the ridge, and then rushed the blockhouse from the rear. The garrison was surprised and caught. They fought desperately, but the Londoners overpowered them. The surviving Germans complained bitterly, and said it was impossible to use their machine-guns on every side at once. "It is not a fair way of fighting," said a German officer, and the Londoners laughed and said, "Not half!" and "I don't think!" and other ironical words.

In a big dressing-station up there they captured two doctors and sixty men, of whom many were wounded. The German doctors said, "Have you any wounded we can help? We are not fighting men." And they made themselves useful, and were good fellows.

Down in the valley the Londoners came face to face with a party of Germans who showed fight, but the Londoners—little fellows some of them—walked through them and over dead bodies who had fallen before their rifle-fire. There was a lot of musketry both then and afterwards when the enemy counter-attacked, and they fired like sharpshooters. Down below them and almost behind them the line dropped away to the fort of

Schuler Farm, where the enemy still held out. "There are a lot of Boches down there," said an officer on the brigade staff of the London Territorials. "No," said the brigade major, and then: "Yes, and, by the Lord, there's a German officer staring at me. The blighter is telling one of his men to take a pot at me. See!" The brigade major ducked down his head as a bullet flattened against the blockhouse wall.

It was an awkward situation for the Londoners, but they formed a defensive flank and sent some lads to help the troops who were attacking the position. "Domine dirige nos" is the London motto, and there were many London boys who had it in their hearts that day, and said with the dear old Cockney accent, "Gord 'elp us." That was when the German counter-attacks developed, but were smashed by gun-fire.

In all this fighting, as far as I can find, the Highland Territorials of the 51st Division upon the left had the bloodiest fighting. They gained their ground with difficulty, because a battalion of the Royal Scots was badly held up by wire and bogs and machine-gun fire at a stream called the Lekkerboler-beek. They had to fall back, reorganize, and attack again, which they did with splendid gallantry, and held their ground only by most grim endurance, because the enemy counter-attacked them violently all day long after the objectives had been gained.

The enemy's losses were certainly appalling to him. Officers in this fighting, who have been through many of our great battles, tell me that they have never seen before so many dead as lie upon this ground. In one section of Pheasant Trench a hundred yards long there are nearly a hundred dead. Before the attack our barrage rolled forward slowly, like a devouring fire. Instantly all along the German line green lights rose as S O S signals, but as the barrage swept on, followed by the Scots, the lights went out. They rose again from the farther lines, and then those ceased as the shells reached them. Only in the blockhouses and the dug-outs down by the Lekkerboler-beek were any Germans left alive.

The blockhouses were dealt with by small parties of Highlanders, who had been in training to meet them, and went like wolves about them, firing their machine-guns and rifles through the loopholes if the garrisons would not come out. So they swept on to their final goal, which was at Rose House and the

cemetery beyond Pheasant Farm. These men had some terrible hours to face. By ill-luck their left flank was utterly exposed, and hostile aeroplanes, flying very low, saw this and flew back with the news. The enemy was already developing a series of counter-attacks by his "Stosstruppen," or storm troops, of the 234th Division, which from three o'clock in the afternoon till seven o'clock that evening made repeated thrusts against the Highlanders' front, and the heaviest weight of two and a half battalions was sent forward against this flank. It was preceded by the heaviest German barrage ever seen by these Scots, who have had many experiences of barrage-fire. Officers watching from a little distance were horrified by that monstrous belt of fire, and the garrison of Gordons seemed lost to them for ever. It was not so bad as that. Eventually this flank fell back from Rose House to Pheasant Farm Cemetery and other ground, where they were rallied by a battalion commander, one of the youngest men of his rank in the British Army, who supplied them with fresh ammunition and directed them to hold up the German infantry advancing under cover of their bombardment. In spite of their losses our men fought their way back and regained part of the ground by desperate valour. Our guns wiped out the other counter-attacks one by one, inflicting frightful losses on the enemy. They were caught most horribly as they came along the road. Thirty machine-guns played a barrage-fire on his lines where German soldiers tried to escape across the shell-craters. The Highlanders used their rifles effectively, one man firing over 500 rounds. And a gun was brought into action from a Tank which had come up as far as an advanced blockhouse, in spite of the boggy ground.

There was great slaughter among the enemy that day. Since then the slaughter has gone on, for his counter-attacks have not ceased. His guns have been very active, bombarding parts of our line intensely, and in the air his scouts and raiders have been flying over our lines in the endeavour to observe and destroy our troops and batteries, flying low with great audacity, and using machine-guns as well as bombs. But we hold all the important ground gained last Thursday.

XVI

THE WAY TO PASSCHENDAELE

SEPTEMBER 26

DURING the past forty-eight hours there has been hard and prolonged fighting north and south of the Menin road, and in spite of formidable counter-attacks by the enemy which began early yesterday morning and still continue, our troops have made a successful advance in the neighbourhood of Zonnebeke and southward beyond the Polygon Wood racecourse, which now belongs to the Australians.

It is south of that, by Cameron House and the rivulet called the Reutelbeek, that the enemy's pressure has been greatest, and where the battalions of the 33rd and 39th Divisions on the right of the Australians, including the Queen's, have had the hardest time under incessant fire and attack since dawn yesterday, but on their right Sherwood Foresters and Rifle Brigade men, also severely tried, have swept across the Tower Hamlets Ridge in the direction of Gheluvelt.

It was fully expected that any new endeavour of ours to advance beyond the ground gained in the battle of September 20 would be met by the fiercest opposition. The capture of Polygon Wood and Westhoek seriously lessened the value of Passchendaele Ridge, which strikes northward and forms the enemy's great defensive barrier, and it was certain that in spite of the heavy losses he has already suffered in trying to get back that high ground above Inverness Copse he would bring up all his available reserves to hinder our further progress at all costs.

For two days before yesterday he made no sign of movement in his lines, and was kept quiet by the breakdown of all his previous counter-attacks, which our men repulsed with most bloody losses to the enemy, so that their divisions were shattered and demoralized. The German Command used that time to drag the broken units out of the line and to replace them or hurry up to their support the reserves who had been waiting in the rest areas behind. These men were rushed up by motor-omnibus and railways to points where it was necessary to take to the roads and march to the assembly positions ready for immediate counter-attacks. Those were in the Zandvoorde

and Kruiseik neighbourhood, south-east of Gheluvelt, ready to strike up to the Tower Hamlets Ridge while others could be assembled behind the Passchendaele Ridge.

No doubt our attack for this morning did not leave out of account the strength of resistance likely to be offered. The enemy showed signs of desperate anxiety to check us on the Polygon Wood line, and the ground going south of it to the Gheluvelt Spur, and he made a great effort by massed artillery to smash up the organization behind our lines, and by a series of thrusts to break our front. On Monday afternoon, increasing to great intensity yesterday, he flung down his barrage-fire in Glencorse Wood and Inverness Copse, fired large numbers of heavy long-range shells over Westhoek Ridge, Observatory Ridge, Hooge, and other old spots of ill-fame, and concentrated most fiercely on the ground about Cameron House, Black Watch Corner, and the Tower Hamlets.

At six o'clock yesterday morning, supported by this terrific fire, he launched his first attack on the Surreys, Scottish Rifles, Middlesex Regiment, and other troops around the Tower Hamlets, and owing to their losses they were obliged to fall back some little way in order to reorganize for an assault to recapture their position. These fought through some awful hours, and several of their units did heroic things to safeguard their lines, which for a time were threatened.

While they were fighting in this way the 4th and 5th Australians, on the high ground this side of Polygon Wood racecourse and the mound which is called the Butte, also had to repel some fierce attacks which opened on them shortly after eight o'clock in the morning. The enemy was unable to pierce their line, and fell back from this first attempt with great losses in dead and wounded. It was followed by a second thrust at midday and met the same fate. At two o'clock in the afternoon the Australians sent some of their men to help the Surreys and the English troops on their right, who were passing through a greater ordeal owing to the storm of fire over them and the continued pressure of the enemy's storm troops, who were persistent through the afternoon in spite of the trails of dead left in their tracks. It was a serious anxiety on the eve of a new battle, but it failed to frustrate our attack. All the area through which the enemy was trying to bring up his troops was made hideous by artillery-fire and the work of the Royal Flying Corps.

It was a clear moonlight night, with hardly a breath of air blowing, and all the countryside was made visible by the moon's rays, which silvered the roofs of all the villages and made every road like a white tape. Our planes went out over the enemy's lines laden with bombs, and patrolled up and down the tracks and made some thirty attacks upon the German transport and his marching columns. All his lines of approach were kept under continual fire by our guns of heavy calibre, and for miles around shells swept the points which marching men would have to pass, so that their way was hellish. Our aircraft went out and flew very low, and dropped bombs wherever they saw men moving through the luminous mists of the night. Behind our own lines air patrols guarded the countryside. They carried lights, and as they flew in the starlit sky they themselves looked like shooting stars until they dropped low, when their planes were diaphanous as butterfly's wings in sunlight. On the battlefield there was no unusual gun-fire for several hours after dark. Guns on both sides kept up the usual night bombardment in slow sullen strokes, but at least on the Australian front it was not until about 4·45 in the morning that the enemy opened a heavy barrage in Glencorse Wood. The Australian troops were already massed beyond that ground for the attack which was shortly due. On the north, up by Wurst Farm, on the lower slopes of the Gravenstafel, our London Territorials were also waiting to go "over the bags," as they call it. Against them the German guns put over a heavy barrage, but that line of explosives failed to stop or check the assault.

It was almost dark when our London lads went forward through a thick ground mist, which was wet and clammy about them. Our artillery had opened before them the same monstrous line of barrage-fire which they had followed on the 20th, and they went after it at a slow trudge, which gave them time to avoid shell-craters and get over difficult ground without lagging behind that protecting storm. That violence of fire was as deadly and terrifying this morning as on that other day. Through the mist our men saw the Germans running and falling, and many of them did not stay in the blockhouses, though it was almost certain death to come out into the open before the barrage passed. There were dead men in many shell-craters before our men reached them, and others afterwards, as they passed through clumps of ruin which had once been

hamlets and farms. There was such a mess of brickwork and masonry at Aviatik Farm, where Germans hiding in concrete walls fired machine-guns and rifles for a time until the British troops closed on them.

Something like 150 prisoners were taken in this section of the attack, and one of them was a queer bird who belonged to the sea. That is to say, he had been a sailor on the *Dresden* and was in the battle of Falkland Island and off Coronel, where he was picked up by a Swedish boat and taken back to Germany. To his disgust he was put in the 10th Ersatz Division, and now, after his soldier life, wants to work in a British shipyard. He was surprised at the food given to him, and thought it was a bribe to get information from him, believing that England is agonizing with hunger.

About a hundred and fifty prisoners were taken also, by the troops on the right of this section, belonging mostly to the 23rd Reserve Division, with some of the 3rd Guards. Our men who attacked in the direction of Zonnebeke village were Leicesters, Notts and Derbys, East Yorks, Royal Scots, Gordons, and King's Own, and they had some stiff fighting on the way to the Windmill Cabaret and Hill Forty, which seems to be the key to the position. Here they came against some of the blockhouses at Toronto Farm and Van Isackere Farm, but did not meet great trouble there. Some of them had been so badly knocked by shell-fire that the garrisons inside were killed by concussion, and from others men came out to surrender as soon as our men were near them. Near the village of Zonnebeke the fight was more serious against the Royal Scots and East Yorks, and the enemy's gun-fire, which had not been very heavy on the other ground of attack, smashed along the line of the railway embankment.

The Australian advance across the racecourse of Polygon Wood and northward across the spur to below Zonnebeke Château was steady and successful. There was a regular chain of blockhouses on the way, but there again the old black magic of the pill-box failed. The men rallied inside them, many of them being Poles of the 49th Regiment, who hate the Prussians in a fierce way and ask us to kill as many as possible for their sake. Most of them were quick and glad to surrender. A platoon of them were taken in some wooden dug-outs below the high mound of Polygon Wood, that old Butte which is supposed to

be the burial-place of a prehistoric chief, though by the Australians it is believed to be the observation-post of Sir Douglas Haig in 1914.

The enemy's gun-fire was heavy over part of the ground, and there was a nest of machine-guns along a road which gave some trouble, but in the main attack the losses of the Australians were not heavy up to the time they gained the last objective. It was our aircraft which brought back the first news of the Anzacs on the racecourse in Polygon Wood, and later they had reached the farthest goal, where prisoners were surrendering freely. On the left of their front the Australians were quite satisfied with their position. On the right they had great anxiety because of the check to the troops below them. At one time it was found advisable for the Australians to swing back their flank a little in order to avoid its exposure. But the Australians are full of confidence and are sure that they can handle any counter-attack which may be launched against them. It has been a hard day for all our men, especially for those who bore the brunt of the enemy's fire, and I believe will be counted as one of the biggest days of fighting in this war. Its decision is of vital importance to the enemy and to ourselves, and so far it is in our favour.

XVII

THE BATTLE OF POLYGON WOOD

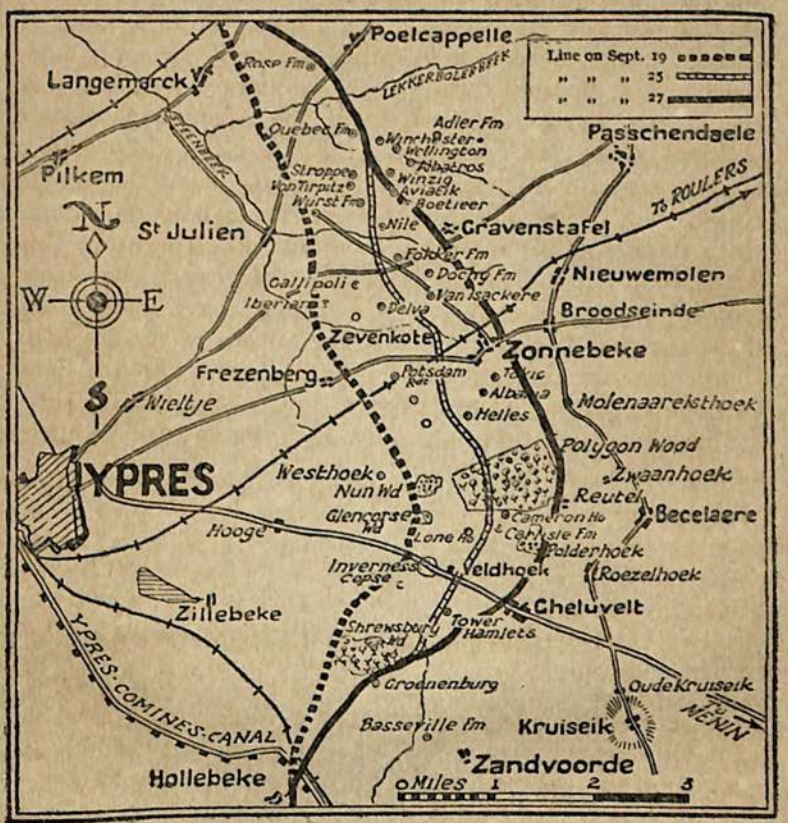
SEPTEMBER 27

THE battle which began yesterday morning, after a whole day of counter-attacking by the enemy, in great numbers and by great gun-fire, lasted until nightfall, and, as I told yesterday, did not pass without anxious hours for those in command, and trying hours for some of our fighting men.

From the left above Zonnebeke down to the Australian front on the heights of the Polygon Wood Racecourse the advance was made with fair ease through the blockhouse system and without severe losses, as they are reckoned in modern warfare, in spite of difficult bits of ground and the usual snags, as our men call them, in the way of unexpected machine-gun fire, odd bits of trench to which small groups of Germans clung stub-

bornly, dirty swamps which some of our men could not cross quickly enough to keep up with the barrage, and danger zones upon which the enemy heaped his explosives.

There were incidents enough for individual men to be remembered for a lifetime, hairbreadth escapes, tight corners in which men died after acts of fine heroism, and strong points



like Hill 40, on the left of the ruins of Zonnebeke, around which some of our troops struggled with fortune.

Apart from local vicissitudes here and there during these first hours of the battle it became clear by midday, or before, that from the extreme left of the attack down to the vicinity of Cameron House, on the right of the Australians, the general success of the day was good. The critical situation was on the right of the 4th and 5th Australians, and involving their

right because of the enemy's violent pressure on British troops there during the previous day, and again when our new attack started, so that their line had been somewhat forced back and the Australian right flank was exposed.

Hour after hour reports coming from this part of the field were read with some anxiety when it was known how heavily some of our battalions were engaged. This menace to our right wing was averted by the courage of men of the Middlesex and Surrey Regiments of the 33rd Division, with Argylls and Sutherlands and Scottish Rifles, and by the quick, skilful, and generous help of the Australian troops on their left. It is an episode of the battle which will one day be an historic memory when all the details are told. I can only tell them briefly and in outline.

After terrific shelling, on Tuesday last, the enemy launched an attack at six o'clock against our line by Carlisle Farm and Black Watch Corner, south of Polygon Wood, and forced some of our English troops to fall back towards Lone House and the dirty little swamp of the Reutelbeck. These boys of Middlesex and Surrey suffered severely. For some time it was all they could do to hold out, and the enemy was still pressing. A body of Scottish Rifles was sent up to support them, and by a most brave counter-thrust under great gun-fire restored part of the line, so that it was strong enough to keep back any advancing wave of Germans by rifle and machine-gun fire.

Another body of men, the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, held out on exposed ground, isolated from the main line, and threatened with being cut off by the enemy's assault troops. Sir Douglas Haig has mentioned them specially in his message yesterday, and they deserve great honour for the heroic way in which they held on to this ground for many hours that day and night under harassing fire from coal-boxes, or 5·9's, which threatened to wipe out their whole strength. Yesterday they had strength and spirit left to renew the attack, and to make another attempt to get back the lost ground into which the enemy had driven a wedge.

At the same time the Australians had realized the dangerous situation which exposed their right flank, and they directed a body of their own troops to strike southward in order to thrust back the German outposts. Those Australian troops shared

the peril of their comrades on the right, and withstood the same tornado of shelling which was flung over all the ground here; but in spite of heroic sacrifice did not at first wholly relieve the position of the Australian right, which remained exposed. After the great attack by the Anzacs in the morning their line was thrust right out beyond Cameron House, but the English and Scottish troops of the 33rd Division, who had also gone forward in the new attack south of them, were again met by a most deadly barrage-fire and checked at a critical time. I was with some of the Australians yesterday when all this was happening, and when there was cause for worry. They were unruffled, and did not lose confidence for a moment.

"Give us two hours," said one of them who had a right to speak, "and we will make everything as sound as a bell." In those two hours they drew back their flank to get into line on a curve going back towards Lone House, and established defensive posts which would hold off any attack likely to be launched against them.

"It is hard luck on the English boys down there," said the Australians, "but they have had a bad gruelling, and they will come along in spite of it. There is not an Australian in France who doesn't know how the Tommy-Boys fought on the 20th, and that will do for us."

The "Tommy-Boys," as the Australians call them, fought as they have fought in three years of great battles, and in spite of the ordeal through which they had passed—and it was not a light one—they saved the situation on that ground below Polygon Wood, and made it too dangerous and too costly for the enemy to stay. Early this morning the survivors of the Germans who had thrust a wedge between our lines past Cameron House crawled out again and our line was straightened.

How the Australians established themselves on Polygon Wood Racecourse and beyond the big mound called the Butte I told in my message yesterday. Farther north the Leicesters, Notts and Derbys, Royal Scots, Gordons, and King's Own of the 59th and 3rd Divisions had attacked north of the Ypres—Roulers railway, running at right angles to the Langemarck—Zonnebeke road. On that road, barring the way, was the station of Zonnebeke, now a mass of wreckage, fortified with

machine-gun redoubts, and farther south the ruins of Zonnebeke church and village. Across the road was the Windmill Cabaret, an old inn which has been blown off the map on the high ground of Hill 40, which rises gradually to a hump a hundred yards or so north of the station. It was bad ground to attack, and strewn with little blockhouses of the new type, though they are still called pill-boxes after an older and smaller type. The blockhouses did not give much trouble. Our new form of barrage, the most frightful combination of high explosives and shrapnel that has yet appeared in war, rolled backwards and forwards about them, so that the garrisons huddled inside until our men nipped behind them and thrust rifles or bombs through the machine-gun loopholes, if they had not previously escaped to shell-craters around where they might have more chance of escape.

And here I might say in passing that the enemy has already modified his methods of holding the blockhouses, and while only a few men remain inside, distributes the rest of the garrison in shell-holes on either side, with their machine-guns in the organized craters. Some of them were found by our men, and though many of them had been killed by our gun-fire, others remained shooting and sniping until they were routed out.

The worst part of the ground on this line of attack was around a blockhouse called Bostin Farm, where there was a dismal, stinking swamp so impassable that the Royal Scots, Scottish Fusiliers, and East Yorks of the 3rd Division who tried to make their way through it lost touch with the barrage, which rolled ahead of them, and had to work round and up towards Hill 40. Here they came under machine-gun fire, and although some men forced their way up the slope of the knoll on which the Windmill Cabaret stood, they did not quite reach the crest.

Meanwhile men of the Gordons, Suffolks, and Welsh Fusiliers were attacking round about Zonnebeke, where the ground was swept by machine-gun bullets, and seized the ruin of the church and the outskirts of the station yard. There was heavy shelling from the enemy all day, which caused the line to fall back a little, and at six o'clock yesterday evening the enemy launched two counter-attacks from Zonnebeke and another around Hill 40. Half an hour later the Royal Scots and

Royal Scottish Fusiliers moved forward to thrust the enemy back, and at exactly the same time another counter-attack of his advanced in their direction. Each body of men were protected by barrage-lines of heavy shell-fire, and our shells and the German shells mingled and burst together in a wide belt of fury, and sometimes neither side could cross it.

Farther north South Midland men did well. They advanced from Zevenkote on the right and Schuler Farm on the left to Van Isackere Farm and Dochy Farm and other blockhouses on each side of the high road between Langemarck and Zonnebeke with hardly a check. They found many of the blockhouses badly damaged after the heavy fire that had been poured on each one of them, and if they were not damaged the men inside were so nerve-shaken that they were eager to surrender. Apparently they had not expected the attack to follow the hurricane bombardment, because there had been other shoots of this kind before, and they made no real attempt to get their machine-guns into action. It was from the slopes of the Gravenstafel and the Abraham Heights beyond that machine-gun fire fell upon the Midland men, and the enemy's guns were shooting down the gullies between these ridges. But the ground in this part of our attack yesterday was taken without grave trouble and without great losses.

Most of the prisoners taken on this ground were Saxons, and those I have seen marching down to a captivity which they prefer to the field of battle are men of a good physique, and smart, soldierly look. It is astonishing how quickly they recover from the effect of bombardment and the great horror of battle as soon as they get beyond the range of shell-fire. But they are gloomy and disheartened. The officers especially acknowledge that things are going badly for Germany, and say that there is, for the time at least until the new class is ready, a dearth of men of fighting age, so that the drafts they get are miserable and unfit. They are overwhelmed with the thought of the monstrous gun-power which we have brought against them to counteract their own artillery, which once had the mastery, and they are struck by the audacity of our air service.

Certainly our flying men have been doing all in their power to make life intolerable on the German side of the lines. I have

already described how they went out on Tuesday night and broke up the columns of men marching to attack us. One of these birds found a different kind of prey. It was opposite the Australian front where a team of German gunners were getting a gun away. Our airman flew low over the heads of the gunners and played his machine-gun on to them and dropped bombs. He smashed up the gun-limber and laid out the gunners, and the gun remains there still, with the bodies of men and horses around it. To-day out beyond Ypres I saw flights of our men going out again beyond the German lines for that battle in the air which has never ceased since the battle of Flanders two months ago.

The weather is still in our favour, and there is a blue sky to-day and a soft, golden light over all this Flemish countryside where our troops go marching up to the lines with their bands playing, or lie resting in the hop-fields on the way. That old place of horror, the Yser Canal, reflected the blue above, and in the air there was that sense of peace which belongs to the golden days of autumn. But the guns were loud, and the flight of their shells went crying through the sky.

OCTOBER 2

THROUGH the haze which lies low over Flanders, though above there is still a blue sky, the noise of great gun-fire goes on, rising and falling in gusts, and, like the beat of surf to people who live by the sea, it is the constant sound in men's ears, not disturbing their work unless they are close enough to suffer from the power behind the thunder-strokes. The trees are yellowing into crinkled gold, and there is the touch and smell of autumn in the night air, and the orchards of France are heavy with fruit. Wonderful weather, the soldiers say. The artillery battle is endless, and on both sides is intense and widespread. It was followed yesterday by five German counter-attacks, which did not reach our lines. In a very desperate way the enemy is trying to push us back from positions which are essential to the strength of his defence. All his guns are at work. Is it the last phase of the war? Does the enemy know that he must win or lose all? Our men have that hope in their hearts, and fight more grimly and with higher spirit because of it. The success of the last two battles has deepened the hope, and men come back from the line, back

to the rest-billets, with the old conviction newly revived that at last they have the enemy down and under and very near hopelessness. In the rest-billets are the men who come back. They come marching back along the dusty roads from the fire-swept zone, first across ground pitted with new-made shell-holes, with the howl of shells overhead, and then through broken villages on the edge of the battlefields, and then through standing villages where only a gap or two shows where a haphazard shell has gone, and then at last to the clean, sweet country which no high explosives reach, unless a hostile airman comes over with his bombs.

In any old billet in Flanders one hears the tale of battle told by men who were there, and it is worth while, as yesterday, when I sat down at table with the officers of a battalion of Suffolks in a Flemish farmhouse. The men were camped outside, and as I passed I liked the look of these lads, who had just come out of one of the stiffest fights of the war. They looked amazingly fresh after one night's rest, and they stood in groups telling their yarns in the good old dialect of their county, laughing as though it had all been a joke, though it was more than a joke with death on the prowl.

"Your men look fit," I said to the colonel of the Suffolks, and he smiled as though he liked my words, and said, "You couldn't get their tails down with a crowbar. It was a good show, and that makes all the difference. They have been telling the Australian boys that you have only got to make a face at the Hun and he puts his hands up. They knocked the stuffing out of the enemy."

Inside the farmhouse there was the battalion mess, at one long table and one short, because it was felt better for all the officers to be together instead of splitting up into company messes. I looked down the rows of faces, these clean-cut English faces, and was glad of the luck which had brought so many of these young officers back again. They told the tale of the battle, and each of them had some detail to add, because that was his part of the show, and it was his platoon, and they had left the fighting-line the night before. They spoke as though all the things had happened long ago, and they laughed loudly at episodes of gruesome interest and belonging to those humours of war which are not to be written.

There was a thick mist when they went away at dawn, so

dense that they could not see the line of our barrage ahead, though it was a deep belt of bursting shells. They had been told to follow close, and they were eager to get on. They went too fast, some of them almost incredibly fast, over the shell-craters, and round them, and into them, and out of them again, stumbling, running, scrambling, not turning to look when any comrade fell.

"I was on the last position three-quarters of an hour before the barrage passed," said a young officer of the Suffolks. He spoke the words as if telling something rather commonplace, but he knew that I knew the meaning of what he said, a frightful and extraordinary thing, for with his platoon he had gone ahead of our storm of fire and had to wait until it reached and then passed them. Some of their losses were because of that, and yet they might have been greater if they had been slower because the enemy was caught before they could guess that our men were near. They put up no fight in the pill-boxes, those little houses of concrete which stank horribly because of the filth in them, and from the shell-craters where snipers and machine-gunners lay men rose in terror at the sight of the brown men about them, and ran this way and that like poor frightened beasts, or stood shaking in an ague of fear. Some ran towards their own lines with their hands up, shouting "Kamerad," believing they were running our way. They were so unready for attack that the snipers had the safety-clip on their rifle-barrels, and others were without ammunition.

In one shell-hole was an English-speaking German. "I saved him," said one of the young Suffolk officers. "He was a downhearted fellow, and said he was fed up with the war and wanted nothing but peace."

Near another shell-hole was a German who looked dead. He looked as if he had been dead for a long time, but an English corporal who passed close to this body saw a hand stretch out for a bayonet within reach, and the man raised himself to strike. Like a man who sees a snake with his fangs out, the corporal whipped round, grabbed the German's bayonet and ran him through. The way to the last objective was easy on the whole, and the enemy was on the run with our men after them until they were ordered to stop and dig in. The hardest time came afterwards, as it nearly always comes when the ground gained had to be held for three more days and nights

without the excitement of attack and under heavy fire. That is when the courage of men is most tried, as this battalion found. The enemy had time to pull themselves together. The German gunners adapted their range to the new positions and shelled fiercely across the ways of approach, and scattered 5·9's everywhere. It was rifle-fire for the Suffolk men all the time. They had not troubled to bring up a great many bombs, for the rifle has come into its own again, now that the old trench warfare is gone for a time, or all time, and with rifle-fire and machine-gun fire they broke down the German counter-attacks and caught parties of Germans who showed themselves on the slopes of the Passchendaele Ridge, and sniped incessantly. They used a prodigious quantity of small-arms ammunition, and the carriers risked their lives every step of the way to get it up to them. They fired 30,000 rounds and then 16,000 more. There was one officer who spent all his time sniping from a little patch of ground that had once been a garden. He lay behind a heaped ruin and used his field-glasses to watch the slopes of rising ground on his left, where human ants were crawling. Every now and then he fired and picked off an ant until his score reached fifty. German planes came flying over our troops to get their line, flying very low, so that their wings were not a tree's height above the shell-craters, and our boys lay doggo not to give themselves away. Some of the hostile planes were red-bellied, and others which came searching the ground were big, porpoise-like planes. They dropped signal-lights and directed the fire of the 5·9's. A private of the Suffolks, lying low but watchful, saw a light rise from the ground as one of these machines came over, and it was answered from the aeroplane. "That's queer," he thought; "dirty work in that shell-hole." He crept out to the shell-hole from which the signal had come, and found three German soldiers there with rockets. They tried to kill him, but it was they who died, and our man brought back their rifles and kit as souvenirs.

More rifle ammunition was wanted as the time passed, and the carriers took frightful risks to bring it. The drums of the Suffolks did well that day as carriers and stretcher-bearers, passing up and down through the barrage-fire, and there was a private who guided a party with small-arms ammunition—ten thousand rounds of it—to the forward troops, with big shells bursting over the ground. Twice he was buried by shell-bursts,

which flung the earth over him, but on the way back he helped to carry a wounded man 800 yards to the regimental aid post under hot fire. He was a cool-headed and gallant-hearted fellow, and went up again as a volunteer to the forward positions, and on the same night crawled out on a patrol with a young lieutenant to reconnoitre a position on the left which was still in German hands. From farther left, on rising ground, the Germans sprinkled machine-gun fire over the battalion support lines, and the earth was spitting with those bullets. But in their own lines the German soldiers were moving about with Red Cross flags picking up their wounded, and they did not fire at our stretcher-bearers, apart from the barrage-fire of 5·9's through which they had to make their way. Only once did they play a bad trick. Under the Red Cross flag some stretcher-bearers went into a pill-box which had been abandoned, and shortly after machine-gun fire came from it. That is the kind of thing which makes men see red.

XVIII

ABRAHAM HEIGHTS AND BEYOND

OCTOBER 4

ANOTHER great battle has opened to-day, and in a wide attack from the ground we captured on September 26, north and south of the Polygon Wood crest, our troops have advanced upon the Passchendaele Ridge, and have reached the Gravenstafel and Abraham Heights, which crown a western spur of the ridge, and Broodseinde, which is the high point and keystone of the enemy's defence lines beyond Zonnebeke. South of that they are fighting between Cameron House and Becelaere, across the Reutelbeek and its swampy ground, and down beyond Polderhoek to the south end of the Menin road. The divisions engaged, from north to south, were the 29th, 4th, 11th, 48th, New Zealand, 3rd, 2nd, and 1st Australians.

This morning I saw hundreds of prisoners trailing back across the battlefield, and crowds of them within the barbed-wire enclosures set apart for them behind our lines. Our lightly wounded men coming down the tracks for walking wounded speak, in spite of their blood and bandages, of a smashing blow dealt against the enemy and of complete victory. "We have

him beat," say the men, and they are sure of this, sure of his enormous losses and of his broken spirit, although the fighting has been bloody because of the great gun-fire through which our men have had to pass. It has been a strange and terrible battle—terrible, I mean, in its great conflict of guns and men—and the enemy, if all goes well with us, may have to remember it as a turning-point in the history of this war, the point that has turned against him with a sharp and deadly edge. For, realizing his great peril if we strengthened our hold on the Passchendaele Ridge, and knowing that we intended that—all signs showed him that, and all our pressure on these positions—he prepared an attack against us in great strength in order to regain the ground he lost on September 26, or, if not that, then so to damage us that our advance would be checked until the weather choked us in the mud again. His small counter-attacks, or rather his local counter-attacks, for they were not weak, had failed. Even his persistent hammering at the right wing by Cameron House, below Polygon Wood, had failed to bite deeply into our line, though for a time on September 25 it had been a cause of grave anxiety to us and made the battle next day more difficult and critical. But these attacks had failed in their purpose, and now the German High Command decided for a big blow, and it was to be delivered at seven o'clock this morning. It was a day and an hour too late. Our battle was fixed for an hour before his.

And so it happened that our men had to pass through a German barrage to follow their own, a barrage which fell upon them before they leapt up to the assault, and it happened also most terribly for the enemy that our men were not stopped, but went through that zone of shells, and on the other side behind our barrage swept over the German assault troops and annihilated their plan of attack. . . . They did not attack. Their defence even was broken. As our lines of fire crept forward they reached and broke the second and third waves of the men who had been meant to attack, caught them in their support and reserve positions, and we can only guess what the slaughter has been. It is a slaughter in which five German divisions are involved.

This battle of ours, which looks like one of the greatest victories we have had in the war, was being prepared on a big

scale as soon as the last was fought and won. No words of mine can give more than a hint of what those preparations meant in the scene of war. For several days past the roads to the Front have been choked with columns of men marching forward, column after column of glorious men, hard and fit, and hammering a rhythm on the roads with the beat of their feet, and whistling and singing, in tune and out of tune, with the fifes and drums far ahead of them. Always, night and day, there was the sound of this music, always in the stillness of these moonlight nights the thud, thud of those tramping feet, always, along any track that led towards the salient, the vision of these battalions led forward by young officers with their trench sticks swinging and a look of pride in their eyes because of the fellows behind them. Their steel helmets flashed blue in the sun so that a column of them seen from a distance was like a blue stream winding between the hop-fields, or the broken ruins of old villages, or the litter of captured ground. With them and alongside of them went the tide of transport—lorries, wagons, London buses, pack-mules, guns and limbers, and the black old cookers with their trailing smoke. Everywhere there has been a fever of work, Tommies, "Chinkies," coloured men piling up mountains of ammunition to feed the guns. Under shell-fire, bracketing the roads on which they worked, pioneers carried on the tracks, put down new lengths of duck-board, laid new rails. The enemy's artillery came howling over to search out all this work, which had been seen by aeroplanes, and at night flocks of planes came out in the light of the moon to drop bombs on the men and the work. Now and again they made lucky hits —got a dump and sent it flaming up in a great torch, killed horses in the wagon-lines or labouring up with the transport, laid out groups of men, smashed a train or a truck; but the work went on, never checked, never stopping in its steady flow of energy up to the lines, and the valour of all these labourers was great and steady in preparing for to-day. Knowing the purpose of it all, the deadly purpose, the scene of activity by any siding filled one with a kind of fear. It was so prodigious, so vastly schemed. I passed a dump yesterday, and again to-day, in the waste ground on the old battlefield near Ypres and saw the shells for our field-batteries being unloaded. There were thousands of shells, brand-new from the

factories at home, all bright and glistening and laid out in piles. The guns were greedy. Here was food for a monstrous appetite. We watched all this—the faces of the men going up so bright-eyed, so splendid in their youth, so gay, and all these shells and guns and materials of war, and all this movement which surged about us and caught us up like straws in its tide, and then we looked at the sky and smelt the wind, and studied a milky ring which formed about the moon. Rain was coming. If only it would come lightly or hold another day or two—one night at least.

Rain fell a little yesterday. The ground was sticky when I went up beyond Wieltje to look at the Passchendaele Ridge to see some boys getting ready for the "show" to-day, and to watch the beginning of the great bombardment. . . . Curse the rain! It would make all the difference to our fighting men, the difference perhaps between great success and half a failure, and the difference between life and death to many of those boys who looked steadily towards the German lines which they were asked to take. What damnable luck it would be if the rain fell heavily! Last night the moon was hidden and rain fell, but not very hard, though the wind went howling across the flats of Flanders. And this morning, when our men rose from shell-holes and battered trenches and fields of upheaved earth to make this great attack, the rain fell still but softly, so that the ground was only sticky and sludgy, but not a bog. The rain was glistening on their steel helmets, and the faces of our fighting men were wet when they went forward. They had passed already through a fiery ordeal, and some of them could not rise to go with their comrades, and lay dead on the ground. Along the lines of men, these thousands of men, the stretcher-bearers were already busy in the dark, because the enemy had put over a heavy barrage at 5.30, and elsewhere later, the prelude to the attack he had planned. His old methods of defence and counter-attack had broken down in two battles. The spell of the pill-box, which had worked well for a time, was broken, so that those concrete blockhouses were feared as death-traps by the men who had to hold them. The German High Command hurried to prepare a new plan, guessing ours, and moved the guns to be ready for our next attack, registered on their own trenches, which they knew they might lose, and assembled the best divisions, or the next best, ready

for a heavy blow to wind us before we started and to smash our lines, so that the advance would be a thousand times harder. The barrage which the Germans sent over was the beginning of the new plan. It failed because of the fine courage of our troops first of all, and because the German infantry attack was timed an hour too late. If it had come two hours earlier it might have led to our undoing—might at least have prevented anything like real victory to-day. But the fortune of war was on our side, and the wheel turned round to crush the enemy.

The main force of his attack, which was to be made by the Fourth Guards Division, with two others, I am told, in support, was ready to assault the centre of our battle-front in the direction of Polygon Wood and down from the Broodseinde cross-roads. It was our men who fought the German assault divisions at the Broodseinde cross-roads, and took many prisoners from them before they had time to advance very far. The enemy's shelling had been heavy about the ground of Inverness Copse and Glencorse Wood, where a week or so ago I saw the frightful heaps of German dead, and spread over a wide area of our line of battle along the Polygon Wood heights and the low ground in front of Zonnebeke. The men tell me that it did not do them as much harm as they expected. The shells plunged deep into the soft ground, bursting upwards in tall columns, as I saw them this morning on the field, and their killing effect was not widespread. Many of them also missed our waves altogether. So, half an hour later, our men went away behind our own barrage, which was enormous and annihilating. The wet mist lay heavily over the fields, and it was almost dark except for a pale glamour behind the rain-clouds, which brightened as each quarter of an hour passed, with our men tramping forward slowly to their first objective.

The shell-craters on the German side were linked together here and there to form a kind of trench system, but many of these had been blown out by other shell-bursts, and German soldiers lay dead in them. From others, men and boys, many boys of eighteen, rose with their arms upstretched, as white in the face as dead men, but living, and afraid. Across these frightful fields men came running towards our soldiers. They did not come to fight, but to escape from the shell-fire, which tossed up the earth about them, and to surrender. Many of

them were streaming with blood, wounded about the head and face, or with broken and bleeding arms. So I saw them early this morning when they came down the tracks which led away from that long line of flaming gun-fire.

The scene of the battle in those early hours was a great and terrible picture. It will be etched as long as life lasts in the minds of men who saw it. The ruins of Ypres were vague and blurred in the mist as I passed them on the way up, but as moment passed moment the jagged stump of the Cloth Hall, and the wild wreckage of the asylum, and the fretted outline of all this chaos of masonry which was so fair a city once, leapt out in light which flashed redly and passed. So it was all along the way to the old German lines. Bits of villages still stand, enough to show that buildings were there, and where isolated ruins of barns and farmhouses lie in heaps of timber and brickwork about great piles of greenish sand-bags and battered earthworks. Through shell-holes in fragments of walls red light stabbed like a flame, and out of the darkness of the mist they shone for a second with an unearthly brightness. It was the light of our gun-fire. Our guns were everywhere in the low concealing mist, so that one could not walk anywhere to avoid the blast of their fire. They made a fury of fire. Flashes leapt from them with only the pause of a second or two while they were reloaded. There was never a moment within my own range of vision when hundreds of great guns were not firing together. They were eating up shells which I had seen going up to them, and the roads and fields across which I walked were littered with shells. The wet mist was like one great damp fire, with ten miles or more of smoke rising in a white vapour, through which the tongues of flames leapt up, stirred by some fierce wind. The noise was terrifying in its violence. Passing one of those big-bellied howitzers was to me an agony. It rose like a beast stretching out its neck, and there came from it a roar which clouted one's ear-drums and shook one's body with a long tremor of concussion. These things were all firing at the hardest pace, and the earth was shaken with their blasts of fire. The enemy was answering back. His shells came whining and howling through all this greater noise, and burst with a crash on either side of mule tracks and over bits of ruin near by, and in the fields on each side of the paths down which German prisoners came staggering with their wounded. Fresh shell-

holes, enormously deep and thickly grouped, showed that he had plastered this ground fiercely, but now, later in the morning, his shelling eased off, and his guns had other work to do over there where our infantry was advancing. Other work, unless the guns lay smashed, with their teams lying dead around them, killed by our counter-battery work with high explosives and gas; for in the night we smothered them with gas and tried to keep them quiet for this battle and all others.

I went eastward and mounted a pile of rubbish and timber, all blown into shapelessness and reeking with foul odours, and from that shelter looked across to the Passchendaele Ridge and Hill 40 on the west of Zonnebeke and the line of the ridge that goes round to Polygon Wood. It was all blurred, so that I could not see the white ruins of Zonnebeke as I saw them the other day in the sunlight, nor the broken church tower of Passchendaele. It was all veiled in smoke and mist, through which the ridge loomed darkly with a black hump where Broodseinde stands. But clearly through the gloom were the white and yellow cloud-bursts of our shell-fire and the flame of their shell-bursts. It was the most terrible bombardment I have seen, and I saw the fire of the Somme, and of Vimy, and Arras, and Messines. Those were not like this, great as they were in frightfulness. The whole of the Passchendaele Crest was like a series of volcanoes belching up pillars of earth and fire. "It seemed to us," said soldier after soldier who came down from those slopes, "as if no mortal man could live in it, yet there were many who lived despite all the dead."

I saw the living men. Below the big pile of timber and muck on which I stood was a winding path, and other tracks on each side of it between the deep shell-craters, and down these ways came batches of prisoners and the trail of our walking wounded. It was a tragic sight in spite of its proof of victory, and the valour of our men and the spirit of these wounded of ours, who bore their pain with stoic patience and said, when I spoke to them, "It's been a good day; we're doing fine, I think." The Germans were haggard and white-faced men, thin and worn and weary and frightened. Many of them, a large number of them, were wounded. Some of them had masks of dry blood on their faces, and some of them wet blood all down their tunics. They held broken arms from which the sleeves had been cut away, and hobbled painfully on wounded legs. The worst

were no worse than some of our own men who came down with them and among them.

It has been a bad defeat for them, and they do not hide their despair. They did not fight stubbornly for the most part, but ran one way or the other as soon as our barrage passed and revealed our men. Our gun-fire had overwhelmed them. In the blockhouses were groups of men who gasped out words of surrender. Here and there they refused to come out till bombs burst outside their steel doors. And here and there they got their machine-guns to work and checked our advance for a time, as at Joist Farm, on the right of our attack, and at a château near Polderhoek, where there has been severe fighting. There was heavy machine-gun fire from a fortified farm ruin to the north of Broodseinde, and again from Kronprinz Farm on the extreme left. The enemy also put down a heavy machine-gun barrage from positions around Passchendaele, but nothing has stopped our men seriously so far.

The New-Zealanders and Australians swept up and beyond the Gravenstafel and Abraham Heights, went through and past the ruins of Zonnebeke village, and with great heroism gained the high ground about Broodseinde, a dominating position giving observation of all the enemy's side of the country. It has been a wonderful battle in the success that surmounted all difficulty, and if we can keep what we have gained it will be a victorious achievement. The weather is bad now and the rain is heavier, with a savage wind blowing. But that is not good for the enemy's plans, and may be in our favour now that the day has gone well. Our English troops share the honour of the day with the Anzacs, and all were splendid.

OCTOBER 5

THE men who were fighting in the great battle yesterday, and after the capture of many strong positions held their ground last night in spite of many German counter-attacks and heavy fire, tell grim tales, which all go to build up the general picture of the most smashing defeat we have inflicted on the enemy.

On one section of the Front, where the Warwicks, Sherwoods, Lancashire Fusiliers and other county troops of the 48th and 11th Divisions fought up to Poelcappelle and its surrounding blockhouses, six enemy battalions in the front line were either

taken or killed. The men themselves do not know those figures. They only know that they passed over large numbers of dead and that they took many prisoners.

The New-Zealanders and the Australians on their right, fighting up the Abraham Heights, took over 2000 prisoners, and say that they have never seen so many dead as those who lay shapeless in their tracks. Other Australians fighting for the Broodseinde cross-roads have counted 960 dead Germans on their way. The full figure of the German dead will never be counted by us. They lie on this battle-ground buried and half-buried in the water of shell-holes, in blockhouses blown on top of them, and in dug-outs that have become their tombs. They fought bravely in some places with despairing courage in or about some of the blockhouses which still gave them a chance of resistance, and sometimes worked their machine-guns to the last. Men lying in shell-craters still alive among all their dead used their rifles and sniped our men, knowing that they would have to pay for their shots with their lives. That is courage, and New-Zealanders I met to-day, and English lads, were fair to their enemy, and said Fritz showed great pluck when he had a dog's chance, though many of them ran when we got close to them behind the barrage. It was the barrage that made them break. The Fourth Guards Division seems to have fought well on the line of our first objective, though after that they would not stand firm, and ran or surrendered like the others.

Owing to the coincidence of the simultaneous attack from both sides yesterday morning, and the complete overthrow of the German assault divisions who were about to advance on us, there seems no doubt that some confusion prevailed behind the German lines and on the left and centre of our attack. All their attempts at counter-thrusts were badly planned, and led to further disaster. They did not advance in orderly formation, but straggled up from local reserves and supports, and were smashed in detail by our artillery. So it happened with two battalions who came down the road to Poelcappelle, but withered away. The Lancashire Fusiliers of the 11th Division in that region say the thing was laughable, though it is the comedy of war, and not mirthful in the usual sense. Small groups of Germans wandered up in an aimless way, and were shot down by machine-gun and rifle fire. On the right of the battle-front the enemy's attacks have been more serious and thrust home

with grim persistence against the "Koylies," Lincolns, West Kents, and Scottish Borderers of the 5th Division.

It was after the advance of our men on Polderhoek and its château by the Gheluvelt spur of the Passchendaele Ridge. Some of the Surreys, Devons, and Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry swung round the stream and marshlands of the Reutel and accounted for many of the enemy in close and fierce fighting. The Devons were astride the stream and, working north of it, attacked a slope called Juniper Spur.

In Polderhoek was a nest of machine-guns, which fired out of the ruins of the château, and for some time our men had difficult and deadly work. This was worst against the Scottish Borderers, who were facing the château grounds, but they dug in and made some cover, while behind the prisoners, about 500 of them, were getting back to the safety of our lines.

It was at three o'clock in the afternoon that the enemy sent a very strong counter-attack down the slopes of the Gheluvelt Spur against the 5th and 7th Divisions. Six times through the afternoon masses of men appeared and tried to force their way forward, but each time they were caught under rifle-fire and machine-guns and artillery.

It was at seven o'clock that the heaviest attack came, under cover of savage shelling, and our men had to fall back on the ground beyond Cameron House, which is the scene of the enemy's fierce attacks on September 25, when they were for some little time a serious menace to us. This morning the enemy had driven a wedge into our line in this neighbourhood, and it is quite possible that he will deliver other blows in the same direction. Last night he made no great endeavour to get back ground. It was a dirty night for our men, who had been fighting all day. The rain fell heavily, filling the shell-holes and turning all the broken ground of battle to the same old bog which made so much misery in Inverness Copse and Glencorse Wood and other positions attacked on July 31 and afterwards.

"I lay up to my waist in water," said one of the Devons who came down wounded this morning; "it was bitter cold, and Fritz was putting over his 5·9's; he was also putting over a lot of machine-gun fire, and the bullets came over the heads of our men like the cracking of whips." It was bad for the wounded and the stretcher-bearers—the splendid stretcher-bearers, who worked all through the night up and down through fierce barrage-fire.

Most of them got through with their burdens by that queer miracle of luck which is often theirs. But one little party came down when the fire was fiercest, and took cover in a shell-hole close beside some Warwickshire boys who were crouching in another hole until the storm of shells had passed. Suddenly they heard the howl of a monstrous shell—an eight-inch or even a twelve-inch by the noise if it. It fell and burst right inside the shell-crater where the stretcher-bearers were huddled with their wounded men, and they were blown out of it yards high, so that their bodies were tossed like straws in a fierce wind. . . . I met many men who worked their way down under fire like that, and some who had been wounded already were wounded again, and some of the comrades who trudged with them were killed.

The Warwickshire battalions of the 48th Division on the left of the New-Zealanders had some very hard fighting, lasting all through the day, which concluded with an attack on a position called Terrier Farm, above the pill-boxes of Wellington House and Winchester House, which they had captured after some bad quarters of an hour.

The Warwicks had started with great luck. In spite of the German shelling they had got away to their first objective with only three casualties. They went through the first line of blockhouses without much trouble, picking up prisoners on the way in most of them. Their first trouble came from one of these concrete places called Wellington House. Machine-gun fire came crackling from it, and bullets were also sweeping the ground from hidden emplacements. After twenty minutes' struggle Wellington House fell, and the flanks on either side closed up and went forward, the Warwicks helped on the right by a body of New Zealand men. In the centre the machine-gun fire from those concrete walls ahead caused a check and a gap, and although they tried many times with great gallantry, under brave officers, to silence that fire and work round the blockhouses, they could not do this without greater loss, and decided to link up with their flanks by digging a loop-line in front of those positions, which make a small wedge, or pocket, in our line there.

The attack against Terrier Farm was done by other Warwickshire lads, who were very game after a long day under fire, but for all their spirit tired and cold. They stood almost knee-deep

in mud, and they were wet to the skin, as it was now raining steadily, so a Tank came up to help them, and drew close enough to Terrier Farm to fire broadsides at its concrete and machine-gun its loophole. A white rag thrust through a hole in the wall was the sign of the enemy's surrender. But the conditions were too bad for any greater progress, and the men dug in for the night, while brother Tank crawled back.

All the Tanks used in the battle did well, in spite of the bad going, and helped to reduce several of the blockhouses. They had only two casualties among their crews, and most of them got back to their hiding-places without damage from German shells.

It is astounding that the German counter-attacks were so quickly signalled to the guns, for the light all day was bad, and the weather was dead against the work of the flying men. They did their best by flying low and risking the enemy's fire. There was one pilot who is the talk of the Australians to-day. They watched that English child doing the most amazing "stunts" over the fighting-lines. He was out all day, swooping low, so that his plane seemed just to skim over the craters. The Germans tried to get him by any manner of means. They turned their "Archies" on to him and their machine-guns, and then tried to bring him down with rifle-fire, and that failing, though they pierced his wings many times, they called up the heavies and tried to snipe him with 5·9's, which are mighty big and beastly things. But he went on flying till many of his wires were cut and his struts splintered, and his aeroplane was a rag round an engine. He was bruised and dazed when he came to earth, making a bad landing in our own lines, but not killing either himself or the observer, who shares the honour and the marvel of this exploit.

It was a great day for the Australians and the New-Zealanders, their greatest and most glorious day. I saw them going up—these lithe, loose-limbed, hatchet-faced fellows, who look so free and fine in their slouch hats and so hard and grim in their steel helmets. There were many thousands of them on the roads or camped beside the roads, and Flanders for a time seemed to have become a little province of Australia.

Then the New-Zealanders came along, a type half-way between the English of the old country and the Australian boys—not so lean and wiry, with more colour in the cheeks, and a squarer,

fuller build. It was good to see them—as fine a set of boys as one could see in the whole world, so that it was hard to think of them in the furnace fires up there, and to know that some of them would come back maimed and broken. In a dug-out on the battlefield I talked with some of them, and they were cheery lads, full of confidence in the coming battle. They wanted to go as far as the Australians, to do as well, and among the Australians also there was a friendly rivalry, the new men wanting to show their mettle to those who are already old in war, one battalion keen to earn the honour which belongs by right of valour to another which had fought before. It was certain they would get to the Broodseinde cross-roads if human courage could get there against high explosives, and they were there without a check, over every obstacle, regardless of the enemy's fire, too fast some of them behind their own. So the New-Zealanders went up to Abraham Heights and carried all before them. The hardest time was last night in the mud and the cold, under heavy fire now and then, but they have stuck it out, as our English boys have stuck it through many foul days and in harder times than these, and that is good enough.

The German prisoners do not hide their astonishment at the spirit of our men, and they know now that our troops are terrible in attack, and arrive upon them with a strange, fearful suddenness behind the barrage. One man, a German professor of broad intelligence and a frank way of facing ugly facts, said that our artillery was too terrific for words. They got harassed all the way up to the front line, and lost many men. When they got there they had to lie flat in the bottom of shell-holes, and the next thing they knew was when they were surrounded by masses of English soldiers. He described our men as gallant and chivalrous. This professor thinks it will not be long before Germany makes a great bid for peace by offering to give up Belgium. By midwinter she will yield Alsace-Lorraine, Russia will remain as before the war, except for an autonomous Poland; Italy will have what she has captured; and Germany will get back some of her colonies, he thinks. He laughed when an indemnity was mentioned, and said "Germany is bankrupt." He describes the German Emperor as a broken man and all for peace, the Crown Prince posing as the head of the military party but being unpopular. If the German people knew that

the submarine threat had failed they would demand that the war should stop at once. That is the opinion of one educated German who has suffered the full horror of war, and his words are interesting if they represent no more than his own views.

XIX

SCENES OF BATTLE

OCTOBER 7

THE scene of war since Thursday, when our troops went away in the wet mist for the great battle up the slopes of the Passchendaele Ridge, has been dark and grim and overcast with a brooding sky, where storm-clouds are blown into wild and fantastic shapes. Yesterday over the country round Ypres, which still in its ruins holds the soul of all the monstrous tragedy hereabouts, white cloud-mountains were piled up against black, sullen peaks and were shot through with a greenish light, very ghastly in its revelation of the litter and the wreckage of the great arena of human slaughter. Etched sharply against this queer luminance were the lopped trunks of shell-slashed trees and bits of ruined buildings with tooth-like jags above heaps of fallen masonry. Rain fell heavily for most of the day, as nearly all the night, and as it rains to-day, and a wet fog rose from the ground where the shell-craters were already ponds brimming over into swamps of mud. Through the murk our guns fired incessantly, almost as intense as the drum-fire which precedes an attack, though there was no attack from our side or the enemy's, and it was a strange, uncanny thing to hear all that crashing of gun-fire and the wail of great shells in flight to the German lines through this midday darkness.

I marvelled at the gunners, who have gone on so long—so long through the days and nights—feeding those monsters. The infantry have a hard time. It is they who fight with flesh and blood against the machinery of slaughter which is set against them. It is they who go out across the fields on that wild adventure into the unknown. But the gunners, standing by the heavies and the 18-pounders in the sodden fields, with piles of shells about them and great dumps near by, have no easy, pleasant time. On the morning of the last battle I saw

the enemy's shells searching for them, flinging up the earth about their batteries, ploughing deep holes on either side of them. They worked in the close neighbourhood of death, and at any moment, between one round and another, a battery and its gun teams might be blown up by one of those howling beasts which seem to gather strength and ferocity at the end of their flight before the final roar of destruction. Now and again a lucky shell of the enemy's gets an ammunition dump, and a high torch rises to the dark sky, and in its flames there are wild explosions as the shells are touched off. But the gunners go on with their work in all the tumult of their own batteries, deafening and ear-splitting and nerve-destroying, and our young gunner officers, muddy, unshaven, unwashed, with sleep-drawn eyes, pace up and down the line of guns saying, "Are you ready, Number One?—Number One, fire!" with no sign of the strain that keeps them on the rack when a big battle is in progress. For them the battle lasts longer than for the infantry. It begins before the infantry advance, it lulls a little and then breaks out into new fury when the German counter-attacks begin. It does not end when the S O S signals have been answered by hours of bombardment, but goes on again to keep German roads under fire, to smother their back areas, to batter their gun positions.

So yesterday, when the German guns were getting back behind the Passchendaele, hauled back out of the mud to take up new emplacements from which they can pour explosives on the ground we have captured, our gunners could not rest, but made this work hideous for the enemy and followed his guns along their tracks. The British gunners in these frightful battles have worked with a courage and endurance to the limit of human nature, and the infantry are the first to praise them and to marvel at them. The infantry go marching in the rain and trudging in the mud, and stumbling over the water-logged craters, and out on the battlefield stand knee-deep in pools and bogs that have been made by shell-fire, cutting up the beds of the Flemish brooks, like the Hanebeek and the Stroombeek and the Reutelbeek, and by the heavy downpour on the upheaved earth. Winter conditions have come upon us, too. They were the old winter pictures of war that I saw yesterday round about the old Ypres salient, when wet men gathered under the lee side of old dug-outs with cold rain sweeping upon them,

so that their waterproof capes stream with water, and pattering upon their steel hats with a sharp metallic tinkling sound. Along the roads Australian and New Zealand horsemen go riding hard, with their horses' flanks splashed with heavy gobs of mud. Gun-wagons and transports pass, flinging mud from their wheels. Ambulances, with their red crosses spattered with slime, go threading their way to the clearing-stations, with four pairs of muddy boots upturned beneath the blankets which show through the flap behind, and a dozen "sitting cases" huddled together, with their steel hats clashing and their tired eyes looking out on the traffic of war which they are leaving for a time. They come down cold and wet from the line, but in an hour or two they are warm, inside the dressing-stations, between sand-bagged walls built up inside ruined houses, still within range of shell-fire, but safer than the fields from which these men have come.

"If any man feels cold," said a medical officer yesterday, "give him a hot-water bottle. To a man who had been lying in cold mud until an hour or two before it was like offering him a place by the fireside at home.

The Y.M.C.A. is busy in another tent or another dug-out. It has a cheery way of producing hot cocoa on the edge of a battlefield and of thrusting little packets of chocolate, biscuits, cigarettes, and matches into the hands of lightly wounded men as soon as they have trudged down the long trail for walking wounded and reached the first dressing-station, where there is a little group of men waiting to bandage their wounds, to say, "Well done, laddy; you did grandly this morning," and to fix them up with strange and wonderful speed for the journey to the base hospital, where there are beds with white sheets—sheets again, ye gods!—and rest and peace and warmth.

There are queer little groups between the sand-bags of those forward dressing-stations. On one bench I saw a tall New-Zealander and some Warwick boys—the Warwicks of the 48th Division did famously in this battle—and a farmer's lad from the West Country, who said "It seems to Oi," and spoke with a fine simple gravity of the things he had seen and done; and a thin-faced Lancashire boy, who still wanted to kill more Germans and put them to a nasty kind of death; and a fellow of the Lincolns, who said, "Our lads went over grand."

Near by was a wounded German soldier who had clotted blood over his face and a bloody bandage round his head. A friendly voice spoke to him and said, "Wie gehts mit Ihnen?" ("How are you getting on?") And he looked up in a dazed way and said, "Besser hier als am Kampfe" ("Better here than on the battlefield.")

The tall New-Zealander said: "Fritz fought all right. His machine-gunners fired till we were all round them."

"'Twas a bit of a five-point-nine that hit Oi in the arm," said the farmer's lad. "He put over a terrible big barrage, and Oi was a-laying up till the waist in a shell-hole all filled with mud, and Oi was starved with cold."

"They're all cowards, them Fritzes," said the Lancashire boy. "They ran so hard I couldn't catch them with my bayonet. Then a bullet came and went slick through my head." The bullet failed to kill the Lancashire boy by the smallest fraction of an inch, and had furrowed his skull.

The Warwickshire lads told queer tales of the battle, and they bear out what I have heard from their officers elsewhere. There were numbers of German soldiers who lay about in shell-holes after our barrage had passed over their lines and their blockhouses, and sniped our officers and men as they swarmed forward, though they knew that by not surrendering they were bound to die. It was the last supreme courage of the human beast at bay. There was one of these who lay under the wreckage of an aeroplane, and from that cover he shot some of our men at close range; but because there were many bullets flying about, and shells bursting, and all the excitement of a battle-ground, he was not discovered for some time. It was a sergeant of the Warwicks who saw him first, and just in time. The German had his rifle raised at ten yards range, but the sergeant whipped round and shot him before he could turn. Some of these men were discovered after the general fighting was over, and a nasty shock was given to a young A.D.C. who went with his Divisional General to see the captured ground next day. The General, who is a quick walker, went ahead over the shell-craters, and the A.D.C. suddenly saw two Germans wearing their steel helmets rise before the General from one of the deep holes.

"Now there's trouble," thought the young officer, feeling for his revolver. But when he came up he heard the General

telling two wounded Germans that the English had won a very great victory, and that if they were good boys he would send up stretcher-bearers to carry them down.

All over the battlefield there were queer little human episodes thrust for a minute or two into the great grim drama of this advance by British and Overseas troops up the heights of the Passchendaele Ridge, where thousands of German soldiers who had been waiting to attack them were caught by the rolling storm of shells which smashed the earth about them and mingled them with its clods. One tragic glimpse like this was on the Australian way up to the Broodseinde cross-roads, the key of the whole position, after a body of those Australians had marched many miles through the night over appalling ground under scattered shell-fire, and were only in their place of attack half an hour before it started. The story of that night march is in itself a little epic, but that is not the episode I mean. The Australians drew close to one of the blockhouses, and the sound of their cheering must have been heard by the Germans inside those concrete walls. The barrage had just passed and its line of fire, volcanic in its look and fury, went travelling ahead. Suddenly, out of the blockhouses, a dozen men or so came running, and the Australians shortened their bayonets. From the centre of the group a voice shouted out in English, "I am a Middlesex man, don't shoot. I am an Englishman." The man who called had his hands up, in sign of surrender, like the German soldiers.

"It's a spy," said an Australian. "Kill the blighter." The English voice again rang out: "I'm English." And English he was. It was a man of the Middlesex Regiment who had been captured on patrol some days before. The Germans had taken him into their blockhouse, and because of our gun-fire they could not get out of it, and kept him there. He was well treated, and his captors shared their food with him, but the awful moment came to him when the drum-fire passed and he knew that unless he held his hands high he would be killed by our own troops.

The New-Zealanders had many fights on the way up to the Gravenstafel and Abraham Heights, and one thing that surprised them was the number of pill-boxes and blockhouses inhabited by the enemy close to their own lines. They believed that the foremost ones had been deserted. But it must not be

forgotten that running all through the narrative of this battle is the thwarted plan of the enemy to attack us in strength the same morning and at nearly the same hour. For that reason he had thrust little groups of men into advanced posts and into these most forward blockhouses with orders to hold them at all costs until the attacking divisions should reach and pass them. And for that reason, as we know, the enemy's guns laid down a heavy barrage over our lines half an hour before our attack started.

The New-Zealanders did not escape this shelling, and their brigadiers were under the strain of intense anxiety, not knowing in their dug-outs, over which the enemy's fire passed, whether their boys were so cut up that a successful assault would be impossible. As it happened, the New-Zealanders were not seriously hurt nor thrown into disorder. When the moment came they went away in waves, with the spirit of a pack of hounds on a good hunting morning. As fierce as that and as wild as that. They had not gone more than a few yards before they had fifty prisoners. This was at a blockhouse just outside the New Zealand assembly line. There was no fight there, but the garrison surrendered as soon as our men were round their shelter. The Hanebeek stream flows this way, but it was no longer within its bounds. Our gun-fire had smashed up its track, and all about was a swamp made deeper by the rains.

The New Zealand lads had a devil of a time in getting across and through. Some of them stuck up to the knees and others fell into shell-holes, deep in mud, as far as their belts. "Give us a hand, Jack," came a shout from one man, and the answer was, "Hang on to my rifle, Tom." Men with the solid ground under their feet hauled out others in the slough, and all that was a great risk of time while the barrage was travelling slowly on with its protecting screen of shells.

The only chance of life in these battles is to keep close to the barrage, risking the shorts, for if it once passes and leaves any enemy there with a machine-gun, there is certain death for many men. The New Zealand boys nearly lost that wall of shells because of the mud, but somehow or other managed to scramble on over 800 yards in time enough to catch it up. Many blockhouses yielded up their batches of prisoners, who were told to get back and give no trouble. The first fight for

a blockhouse took place at Van Meulen Farm, just outside the New-Zealanders' first objective. The barrage went ahead and sat down—as one of the officers put it, though the sitting down of a barrage is a queer simile for that monstrous eruption of explosive force. From Van Meulen Farm came the swish of machine-gun bullets, and New Zealand boys began to drop. They were held up for half an hour until the "leap-frog" battalions—that is to say, the men who were to pass through the first waves to the next objective—came up to help.

It was a New Zealand captain, beloved by all his men for his gallantry and generous-hearted ways, who led the rush of Lewis-gunners and bombers and riflemen. He fell dead with a machine-gun bullet in his heart, but with a cry of rage because of this great loss the other men ran on each side of the blockhouse and stormed it.

On the left of the New-Zealanders' line, one of their battalions could see Germans firing from concrete houses on the slopes of the Gravenstafel, and although they had to lose the barrage, which was sweeping ahead again, they covered that ground and went straight for those places under sharp fire. Some of them worked round the concrete walls and hauled out more prisoners. "Get back, there," they shouted, but there was hardly a New-Zealander who would go back with them to act as escort. So it happened that a brigadier, getting out of his dug-out to see what was happening to his men away there over the slopes, received the first news of success from batches of Germans who came marching in company formation under the command of their own officers, and without escort. That was how I saw many of them coming back on another part of the field. From the Abraham Heights there was a steady stream of machine-gun fire until the New-Zealanders had climbed them and routed out the enemy from their dug-outs, which were not screened by our barrage so that they were able to fire. Only the great gallantry of high-spirited young men could have done that, and it is an episode which proved the quality of New Zealand troops on that morning of the battle, so keen to do well, so reckless of the cost. On Abraham Heights a lot of prisoners were taken and joined the long trail that hurried back through miles of scattered shell-fire from their own guns.

The next resistance was at the blockhouse called Berlin, and

the New-Zealanders are proud of having taken that place, because of its name, which they will write on their scroll of honour. It is not an Imperial place. It is a row of dirty concrete pill-boxes above a deep cave, on the pattern of the old type of dug-outs. But it was a strong fortress for German machine-gunners, and they defended it stubbornly. It was a five minutes' job. Stokes mortars were brought up and fired thirty rounds in two minutes, and then, with a yell, the New-Zealanders rushed the position on both sides and flung pea-bombs through the back door, until part of the garrison streamed out shouting their word of surrender. The other men were dead inside. A battalion commander and his staff were taken prisoners in another farm, and the New-Zealanders drank soda-water and smoked high-class cigarettes which they found in this place, where the German officers were well provided. After that refreshment they went on to Berlin Wood, where there were several pill-boxes hidden among the fallen trees and mud-heaps. They had to make their way through a machine-gun barrage, and platoon commanders assembled their Lewis-gunners and riflemen to attack the house in detail. From one of them a German officer directed the fire, and when the gun was silenced inside came out with another and fired round the corner of the wall until our men rushed upon him. Even then he raised his revolver as though to shoot a sergeant, who was closest to him, but he was killed by a bayonet-thrust.

At other parts of the line our English boys were fighting hard and with equal courage, and some of them against greater fire. It was on the right that the enemy's gun-fire was most fierce, and our old English county regiments of the 5th and 7th Divisions—Devons and Staffords, Surreys and Kents, Lincolns with Scottish Borderers, Northumberland Fusiliers, and Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry—opposite Gheluvelt and Polderhoek and the Reutelbeek had to endure some bad hours. I have already mentioned in earlier messages how the enemy made ceaseless thrusts against this right flank of our attacking front, driving a wedge in for a time, so that our men had to fall back a little and form a decisive flank. It is known now that they were misled somewhat by some isolated groups of the enemy who held out in pill-boxes behind Cameron House. When these were cleared out our line swept forward again and established itself on the

far side of that wood. Our men hold the outer houses of Gheluvelt.

The whole of the fighting here was made very difficult by the swamps of the Reutelbeek, worse even than those of the Hanebeek, through which the New-Zealanders crossed, and our English boys were bogged as they tried to cross. But they fought forward doggedly, and by sheer valour safeguarded our right wing in the hardest part of the battle. Meanwhile, far on the north in the district of the Schreiboom astride the Thourout railway, Scottish and Irish troops were fighting on a small front but on an heroic scale. It was the Dublin Fusiliers who fought most recklessly. They had begged to go first into this battle, and they went all out with a wild and exultant spirit. The ground in front of them was a mud-pit, and they had to swing round to get beyond it. They did not wait for the barrage. They did not halt on their final objective, but still went away into the blue, chasing the enemy and uplifted with a strange fierce enthusiasm until they were called back to the line we wanted to hold. They excelled themselves that morning, and could not be held back after the word "Go!"

XX

THE SLOUGH OF DESPOND

OCTOBER 9

ANOTHER battle was fought and another advance was made by our troops to-day with the French, in a great assault on their left. Our Allies gained about 1200 yards of ground in two strides, captured some hundreds of prisoners and many machine-guns and two field-guns, and killed large numbers of the enemy in this attack, and in the bombardments which have preceded it. The Allied troops are within a few hundred yards of that forest of which Marlborough spoke when he said, "Whoever holds Houthulst Forest holds Flanders," and have gone forward about 1500 yards in depth along a line beyond Poelcappelle across the Ypres—Gheluvelt road. The enemy has suffered big losses again. Two new divisions just brought into the line—the 227th straight from Rheims only getting into the line at three o'clock this morning, and the 195th arrived from Russia—have received a fearful baptism of fire, and at least three other

divisions—the 16th, 233rd, and 45th Reserve Division—have been hard hit and are now bleeding from many wounds and have given many prisoners from their ranks into our hands.

How was this thing done? How did we have any success to-day when even the most optimistic men were preyed upon last night by horrid doubts? Our troops, we know, are wonderful. There is nothing they could be asked to do which they would not try to do, and struggle to the death to do. But last night's attack might have seemed hopeless in the morning except to men who had weighed all the chances, who had all the evidence in their hands—evidence, I mean, of the measure of the enemy's strength and spirit—and who took the terrific responsibility of saying "Go!" to the start of this new battle.

It was a black and dreadful night, raining more heavily after heavy rains. The wind howled and raged across Flanders with long, sinister wailings as it gathered speed and raced over the fields. Heavy storm-clouds hiding the moon and the stars broke, and a deluge came down, drenching all our soldiers who marched along the roads and tracks, making ponds about them where they stood. And it was cold, with a coldness cutting men with the sharp sword of the wind, and there was no glimmer of light in the darkness. To those of us who know the crater-land of the battlefields, who with light kit or no kit have gone stumbling through it, picking their way between the shell-holes in daylight, taking hours to travel a mile or two, it might have seemed impossible that great bodies of troops could go forward in assault over such country and win any kind of success in such conditions. That they did so is a proof, one more proof to add to a thousand others, that our troops have in them an heroic spirit which is above the normal laws of life, and that, whatever the conditions may be, they will face them and grapple with them, and, if the spirit and flesh of man can do it, overcome the impossible itself. This battle seems to me as wonderful as anything we have done since the Highlanders and the Naval Division captured Beaumont-Hamel in the mud and the fog. More wonderful even than that, because on a greater scale and in more foul weather.

This morning I have been among the Lancashire and West Riding men of the 66th and 49th Divisions who lay out last night before the attack, which followed the first gleams

of dawn to-day, and who marched up—no, they did not march, but staggered and stumbled up to take part in the attack. These men I met had come back wounded. Only in the worst days of the Somme have I seen such figures. They were plastered from head to foot in wet mud. Their hands and faces were covered with clay, like the hands and faces of dead men. They had tied bits of sacking round their legs, and this was stuck on them with clots of mud. Their belts and tunics were covered with a thick, wet slime. They were soaked to the skin, and their hair was stiff with clay. They looked to me like men who had been buried alive and dug up again, and when I spoke to them I found that some of them had been buried alive and unburied while they still had life. They told me this simply, as if it were a normal thing. "A shell burst close," said a Lancashire fellow, "and I was buried up to the neck." "Do you mean up to the neck?" I asked, and he said, "Yes, up to the neck." There were many like that, and others, without being flung down by a shell-burst or buried in its crater, fell up to their waists in shell-holes and up to their arm-pits, and sank in water and mud.

A long column of men whom I knew had to make their way up at night to join in the attack at the dawn. I had seen them the day before, with rain slashing down on their steel hats and their shiny capes, and I thought they were as grand a set of lads as ever I have seen in France. They were men of the Lancashire battalions in the 66th Division.

It was at dusk that they set out on their way up to the battle-line, and it was only a few miles they had to go. But it took them eleven hours to go that distance, and they did not get to the journey's end until half an hour before they had to attack. It was not a march. It was a long struggle against the demons of a foul night on the battlefield. The wind blew a gale against them, slapping their faces with wet canes, so that their flesh stung as at the slash of whips. It buffeted them against each other and clutched at their rifles and tried to wrench their packs off their backs. And the rain poured down upon them in fierce gusts until they were only dry where their belts crossed, and their boots were filled with water. It was pitch-dark at the beginning of the night, and afterwards there was only the light of the stars. They could not see a yard before them, but only the dark figure of the man ahead. Often that figure ahead fell

suddenly with a shout. It had fallen into a deep shell-hole and disappeared.

"Where are you, Bill?" shouted one man to another. "I'm bogged. For God's sake give me a hand, old lad."

There was not a man who did not fall. "I fell a hundred times," said one of them. "It was nigh impossible to keep on one's feet for more than a yard or two."

So that little party of men went stumbling and staggering along, trying to work across the shell-holes.

"My pal Bert," said one man, "fell in deep, and then sank farther in. 'Charlie,' he cried. Two of us, and then four, tried to drag him out, but we slipped down the bank of the crater and rolled into the slime with him. I thought we should never get out. Some men were cursing and some were laughing in a wild way, and some were near crying with the cold. But somehow we got on."

Somehow they got on, and that is the wonder of it. They got on to the line of the attack half an hour before the guns were to start their drum-fire, and they joined the thousands of other men who had been lying out in the shell-holes all night, and were numbed with cold and waist-high in water.

Not all of them got there. The German guns had been busy most of the night, and big shells were coming over. Thirty men were killed or wounded with one shell, and others were hit and fell into the water-pools, and lay there till the stretcher-bearers—the splendid stretcher-bearers—came up to search for them.

The Lancashires, who had travelled eleven hours, had had no food all that time. "I would have given my left arm for a drop of hot drink," said one of them, "I was fair perished with cold."

Some of them had rum served out to them. They were the lucky ones, for it gave them a little warmth. But others could not get a drop.

One man, who was shaking with an ague when I met him this morning, had a pitiful tragedy happen to him. "I had a jar of rum in my pack," he said, "and the boys said to me, 'Keep it for us till we get over to the first objective. We'll want it most then.' But when I went over I dropped my pack. 'Oh, Christ!' I said, 'I've lost the rum!'"

They went over to the attack, these troops who were cold and hungry and exhausted after a dreadful night, and they gained their objective and routed the enemy, and sent back many

prisoners. I marvel at them, and will salute them if ever I meet them in the world when the war is done.

There were a number of German blockhouses in front of them, beyond Abraham Heights and the Grayenstafel. These were Yetta House and Augustus House and Heine House on the way to Tober Copse and Friesland Copse just outside their line of assault. On their left there was a blockhouse called Peter Pan, though no little mother Wendy would tell stories to her boys there, and instead of Peter Pan's cockcrow there was the wail of a wounded man. Beyond that little house of death were Wolfe Copse and Wolfe Farm, from which the fire of German machine-guns came swishing in streams of bullets. There was no yard of ground without a shell-hole. They were linked together like the holes in a honeycomb, and the German troops, very thick because of their new method of defence—very dense in the support lines though the front line was more lightly held—were scattered about in these craters. Large numbers were killed and wounded when our barrage stormed over them, but numbers crouching in old craters were left alive, and as the barrage passed they rose and came streaming over in small batches, with their hands high—came to meet our men, hoping for mercy. Many prisoners were made before the first objective was reached, and after that by harder fighting. Some of the men in shell-holes, wet like our men and cold like our men, decided to keep fighting, and fired their rifles as our lads struggled forward. The boy who lost his rum-jar met three of these men in a shell-hole, and he threw a bomb at them, and said, "This is to pay back for the gas you gave me a month ago."

A little farther on there was another German in a shell-hole. He was a boy of sixteen or so, and he raised his rifle at the lad of the rum-jar, who flung the bayonet on one side by a sudden blow, but not quick enough to escape a wound in the arm. "I couldn't kill him," said the Lancashire lad; "he looked such a kid, like my young brother, so I took him prisoner and sent him down."

Not all the prisoners who were taken came down behind our lines. The enemy was barraging the ground heavily, and many of their own men were killed, and some of our stretcher-bearers, as they came down with the wounded. Up in the leafless and shattered trees on the battlefield were Germans with machine-guns, and German riflemen who sniped our men as they passed.

Many of these were shot up in the trees and came crashing down. Up on the left of the attack, where our troops were in liaison with the French, the enemy were taken prisoners in great numbers, officers as well as men, and the hostile bombardment was not so heavy as on the right, so that the casualties seem to have been light there. In spite of the frightful ground all the objectives were taken, so that our line has drawn close to Houthulst Forest.

There was heavy fighting by the Worcesters of the 29th Division at a place called Pascal Farm, and a lot of concrete dug-outs on the Langemarck—Houthulst road gave trouble with their machine-guns. Adler Farm, just outside our old line, somewhat south of that, also held out a while, but was mastered, and opened the way to the second objective, which on the right carried the attack through Poelcappelle. Here there was hard fighting, by the Lancashire Fusiliers, South Staffords, and Yorkshires of the 11th, and the German garrison put up a desperate resistance in the brewery of Poelcappelle. On the right there has been grim fighting again in the old neighbourhood of Polderhoek Château, but on either side of it our troops of the 5th Division have made good progress, in spite of intense and concentrated fire from many heavy batteries. The enemy has again had a great blow, and has lost large numbers of men—dead, wounded, and captured. That our troops could do this after such a night and over such foul ground must seem to the German High Command like some black art.

OCTOBER 10

IN my message yesterday I described the appalling condition of the ground and of the weather through which our men floundered in their assault towards Houthulst Forest and Passchendaele. That is the theme of this battle, as it is told by all the men who have been through its swamps and fire, and it is a marvel that any success could have been gained. Where we succeeded—and we took a great deal of ground and many prisoners—it was due to the sheer courage of the men, who refused to be beaten by even the most desperate conditions of exhaustion and difficulty; and where we failed, or at least did not succeed, in making full progress or holding all the first gains, it was because courage itself was of no avail

against the powers of nature, which were in league that night with the enemy's guns.

The brunt of the fighting fell yesterday in the centre upon the troops of North-country England, the hard, tough men of Lancashire and Yorkshire, and it was Lancashire's day especially, because of those third-line Territorial battalions of Manchesters and East Lancashires and Lancashire Fusiliers, with other comrades of the 66th Division. There were some amongst them who went "over the bags," as they call it, for the first time, and who fought in one of the hardest battles that has ever been faced by British troops, with most stubborn and gallant hearts. I know by hearing from their own lips, to-day and yesterday, the narrative of the sufferings they endured, of the fight they made, and of the wounds they bear without a moan.

The night march of some of these men who went up to attack at dawn seems to me, who have written many records of brave acts during three years of war, one of the most heroic episodes in all this time. It was a march which in dry, fine weather would have been done easily enough in less than three hours by men so good as these. But it took eleven hours for these Lancashire men to get up to their support line, and then, worn out by fatigue that was a physical pain, wet to the skin, cold as death, hungry, and all clotted about with mud, they lay in the water of shell-holes for a little while until their officers said, "Our turn, boys," and they went forward through heavy fire and over the same kind of ground, and fought the enemy with his machine-guns and beat him—until they lay outside their last objective and kept off counter-attacks by a few machine-guns that still remained unclogged, and rifles that somehow they had kept dry. Nothing better than that has been done, and Lancashire should thrill to the tale of it, because their sons were its heroes. Dirty, blood-stained, scarecrow heroes, as I met some of them to-day, lightly wounded, but hardly able to walk after the long trail back from the line. It was eleven hours' walking on the way up, and then, after the wild day and half a night under shell-fire and machine-gun fire, eleven hours down again, in shell-holes and out of them, falling every few yards, crawling on hands and knees through slimy trenches, staggering up by the help of a comrade's arm and going on again with set jaws, and the cry of "No surrender!" in their

soul. . . . Gallant men. They had no complaint against the fate that had thrust them into this morass, nor any whimper against their hard luck. They told of the hard time they had had simply and gravely, without exaggeration and without self-pity, but as men who had been through a frightful ordeal with many thousands of others whose luck was no better than theirs and whose duty was the same. They came under severe machine-gun fire from some of the German blockhouses, especially on their flanks. Our barrage-fire had gone travelling beyond them, and because of the swamps and pools it was impossible to keep pace with it. Men were lugging each other out of the bogs, rescuing each other free from the rain-filled shell-pits. So they lost the only protection there is from machine-guns, the screen of great belts of gun-fire, and the Germans had time to get out of the concrete houses and to get up from the shell-holes and fire at our advancing groups of muddy men. Many Germans were sniping from these holes, and others were up broken trees with machine-guns on small wooden platforms. I met one man to-day who had eleven comrades struck down in his own group by one of the snipers. A party was detached to search for the German rifleman, but they could not find him. They got ahead through Peter Pan House and then they had to face another blast of machine-gun fire. The German garrison, in a place called Yetta House, gave trouble in the same way, and there was a nest of machine-guns ahead at Bellevue. Some Yorkshire lads of the 49th Division went up there to rout them out, but what happened is not yet known.

All through the day and last night the Lancashire men were under the streaming bullets of a machine-gun barrage, which whipped the ground about them as fast as falling hailstones, so that no man could put his head above a shell-hole without getting a bullet through his steel hat. I have seen many of those steel hats punctured clean through, but with the men who wore them still alive and able to smile grimly enough when they pointed to these holes. At night the lightly wounded men who tried to get back had a desperate time trying to find their way. Some of them walked away to the German lines and were up to the barbed wire before they found out their mistake. It was difficult to get any sense of direction in the darkness, but the German flares helped them. They rose with a very bright light, flooding the swamps of No Man's Land with a white glare,

revealing the tragedy of the battlefield, where many bodies lay still in the bogs, for many men had been killed. Before the darkness German aeroplanes came over, as it were, in dense flocks. One Lancashire boy declared he counted thirty-seven as he lay looking up to the sky from a shell-hole, and they flew low to see where our men had made their line. Our stretcher-bearers worked through the day and night, but it was hard going even with empty stretchers, and they fell and got bogged like the fighting men, and many were hit by shell-fire and machine-gun bullets. With full stretchers they made their way back slowly, and each journey took many hours, and on the way they stuck many times in bogs and slipped many times waist-deep in shell-holes. The transport and the carriers struggled with equal courage through the slough of despond, trying to get up rations to their cold and hungry comrades and ammunition wanted by riflemen and machine-gunners. Even in water beyond their belts the men tried to clean their rifles and their belts from the mud which had fouled them, knowing that later on their lives might depend on this. And it is a wonderful thing that some counter-attacks were actually repulsed by rifle-fire and by machine-guns, which jam if any speck of dirt gets in their mechanism. That was on the left, when the Coldstream, Irish, and Welsh Guards and some old county regiments of England—Middlesex, Worcesters, Hampshires, Essex—and a gallant little body of Newfoundlanders in the 29th Division had fought forward a long way with rapid success.

The losses of the Guards in going over to the first objective were not heavy. They preceded the attack by a tremendous trench-mortar bombardment, which so frightened the enemy and caused such loss among them that before the infantry advanced many of them came rushing over to our lines to surrender. On the second objective there was heavy fighting at a strong place called Strode House, which was surrounded with uncut wire and defended by heavy machine-gun fire. The Guards, after being checked, rushed it from all sides and captured it with all its garrison. There was more fighting of the same kind farther south, at ruins close to Houthulst Forest, on the edge of the swamps, which seem to be a No Man's Land, because the ground is too wet for the Germans to live there. Very quickly after the attack the enemy countered heavily on the Guards' left, but the Guards held firm and beat it off.

Farther south the Middlesex, Royal Fusiliers, and the Newfoundlanders of the 29th Division went straight through to their objective as far as Cinq Chemins Farm (the Farm of the Five Roads), and they had to resist a series of counter-attacks, starting before half-past eight in the morning. The first of these was shattered by rifle-fire, and the second by artillery-fire, but afterwards, owing no doubt to heavy shelling, our line withdrew a little in front of the Poelcappelle road.

On the left centre of our attack our progress was not maintained. The ground here was deplorable, as the two streams of the Lekkerbolerbeek and the Stroombeek had been cut through by shell-fire, so that their boundaries were lost in broad floods. Mortal men could not pass through quick enough to keep up with a barrage, and after desperate struggles they were forced to withdraw from the forward positions beyond Adler Farm and Burns House.

Round the village of Poelcappelle, now no more than a dust-heap of ruin, there was fierce fighting, and the enemy held out in the brewery, from which he swept the ground with machine-gun bullets so that all approach was deadly. The Yorkshire men of the 11th Division here made repeated rushes, but without much success, it seems.

Meanwhile, on the extreme right of the attack some very grim and desperate work was being done by English troops of famous old regiments round about Reutel and Polderhoek. At Polderhoek the enemy had a nest of dug-outs and machine-gun emplacements behind the château, and in spite of the assaults of Warwicks and Norfolks held them by unceasing fire.

On the north of Polderhoek success was complete in the attack on Reutel, though the village was defended by machine-guns in a cemetery beyond Reutel, and several defended block-houses. These were attacked and taken by the H.A.C., Warwicks, and Devons, and our line of objectives was made good beyond Reutel and Judge Copse, which have been thorns in our side—spear-heads rather—for many days.

Splendid and chivalrous work was done on this part of the ground by the stretcher-bearers. Out of two hundred and fifty labouring in these fields over a hundred were hit, and all of them took the utmost risk to rescue their fallen comrades in the fighting-lines. The sappers and the pioneers, the transport and

the runners, fought not against the enemy from Germany, but against an enemy more difficult to defeat, and that was the mud.

XXI

THE ASSAULTS ON PASSCHENDAELE

OCTOBER 12

OUR troops went forward again to-day farther up the slopes of the Passchendaele Ridge, striking north-east towards the village of Passchendaele itself, which I saw this morning looming through the mist and the white smoke of shell-fire, with its ruins like the battlements of a mediæval castle perched high on the crest.

It has been a day of very heavy fighting, and the supreme success will only be gained by the spirit of men resolute to win in the face of continual blasts of machine-gun bullets, heavy shelling, and weather which has made the ground as bad as ever a battlefield has been. The enemy, if we may believe what his prisoners say, expected the attack, and that they did expect it is borne out by the quickness with which they dropped down their defensive barrage, the violent way in which they shelled our back areas during the night, and by other unmistakable signs of readiness. Perhaps the last attack two days ago through the wild gale and the mud warned them that not even the elements would safeguard them against us, and that our troops, who had already achieved something that was next to impossible, would attempt another and greater adventure.

To me these blows through the mud seem the most daring endeavours ever made by great bodies of men. The strength of the enemy—and he is very strong still—and the courage of the enemy, which is high among his best troops, are not the greatest powers which our men are called upon to overcome in this latest fighting. Given a good barrage, and they are ready to attack his pill-boxes now that we have broken the first evil spell of them. But this mud of Flanders, these swamps which lie in the way, these nights of darkness and rain in the quag-mires—those are the real terrors which are hardest to win through. Yet our men were confident of their fate to-day, and backed each other with astounding courage to take the ground they were asked to take; and that pledge which they made between their battalions was after that night, now three nights

ago, when the Lancashire and Yorkshire men made their march through the mud which I have described in other messages—eleven hours' going before they reached their starting-line after frightful tribulations in the darkness and before they went into the battle, late for their barrage and exhausted in body, but still with the pluck to fight through machine-gun fire to their objectives. They did not go as far as had been hoped, but they did far more than any one might dare expect in such conditions, and the men in to-day's battle depended for success upon the starting-line gained for them by those comrades of North-country England.

The New-Zealanders who went over to-day swore that with any luck, or even without luck, they would plant their flag high, and among those men there was a grim, smouldering fire of some purpose which boded ill for the enemy they should find against them. These are not words of rhetoric, to give a little colour to the dark picture of war, but the sober truth of what was in those New Zealand boys' minds yesterday when they made ready for this new battle.

It was difficult to get the men anywhere near the line of attack, owing to the foulness of the ground. Those who were in their positions the night before—that is, on Wednesday night—found that they were not utterly comfortless in the sodden fields. By a fine stroke of daring and by the great effort of carriers and transport officers, who risked their lives in the task, bivouacs were taken up and pegged out in the darkness under the very nose of the enemy, so that the men should not lie out in the pouring rain, and before dawn came they were taken away, in order not to reveal these assemblies. There was food also, and hot drink close to the fighting-lines, and some of the coldness and horrors of the night were relieved. A clear line was made for the barrage which would be fired by our guns this morning. But some troops had still to go up, and some men had to march through the night as those Lancashire men had marched up three nights before. They had the same grim adventure. They, too, fell into shell-holes, groped their way forward blindly in a wild downpour of rain, lugged each other out of the bogs, floundered through mud and shell-fire from five in the evening until a few minutes only before it was time to attack. The enemy was busy with his guns all night to catch any of our men who might be on the move. He flung down a heavy

barrage round about Zonnebeke, but by good chance it missed one group of men thereabouts, and scarcely touched any of the others in that neighbourhood. But his heavy shells were scattered over a wide area, and came bowling through the darkness and exploding with great upheavals of the wet earth. Small parties of men dodged them as best they could, and pitched into shell-holes five feet deep in water when they threatened instant death. Then gas-shells came whining, with their queer little puffs, unlike the exploding roar of bigger shells, and the wet wind was filled with poisonous vapour smarting to the eyes and skin, so that our men had to put on their gas-masks and walk like that in a worse darkness. These things, and this way up to battle, might have shaken the nerves of most men, might even have unmanned them and weakened them by the fainting sickness of fear. But it only made the New-Zealanders angry. It made them angry to the point of wild rage.

"To Hell with them," said some of them. "We won't spare them when we go over. We will make them pay for this night." They used savage and flaming words, cursing the enemy and the weather and the shell-fire and the foulness of it all.

I know the state of the ground, for I went over its crater-land this morning to look at this flame of fire below the Passchendaele spur. I had no heavy kit like the fighting men, but fell on the greasy duck-boards as they fell, and rolled into the slime as they had rolled. The rain beat a tattoo on one's steel helmet. Every shell-hole was brimful of brown or greenish water; moisture rose from the earth in a fog. Our guns were firing everywhere through the mist and thrust sharp little swords of flame through its darkness, and all the battlefields bellowed with the noise of these guns. I walked through the battery positions, past enormous howitzers which at twenty paces distance shook one's bones with the concussion of their blasts, past long muzzled high velocities, whose shells after the first sharp hammer-stroke went whinnying away with a high fluttering note of death, past the big-bellied nine-point-twos and monsters firing lyddite shells in clouds of yellow smoke. Before me stretching away round the Houthulst Forest, big and dark and grim, with its close-growing trees, was the Passchendaele Ridge, the long, hummocky slopes for which our men

were fighting, and our barrage-fire crept up it, and infernal shell-fire, rising in white columns, was on the top of it, hiding the broken houses there until later in the morning, when the rain ceased a little, and the sky was streaked with blue, and out of the wet gloom Passchendaele appeared, with its houses still standing, though all in ruins. There were queer effects when the sun broke through. Its rays ran down the wet trunks and the forked naked branches of dead trees with a curious, dazzling whiteness, and all the swamps were glinting with light on their foul waters, and the pack-mules winding along the tracks, slithering and staggering through the slime, had four golden bars on either side of them when the sun shone on their 18-pounder shells. There was something more ghastly in this flood of white light over the dead ground of the battlefields, revealing all the litter of human conflict round the captured German pill-boxes, than when it was all under black storm-clouds.

It was at the side of a pill-box famous in the recent fighting that I watched the progress of our barrage up the slopes of Passchendaele, and it was only by that fire and by the answering fire of the German guns with blacker shell-bursts that one could tell the progress of our men.

"How's it going?" asked a friend of two officers of the Guards who came down the duck-boards from Poelcappelle way.

"Pretty well," was the answer. "We have cut off four Boche guns with our barrage, though we only had a little way to go—on the left, you know."

"Big fellows?"

"No, pip-squeak. The usual seventy-seven."

It seemed that there had been a check on the left. Our men had come up against abominable machine-gun fire. On the right things were doing better. Our line was being pushed up close to Passchendaele, within a few hundred yards or so. Some prisoners were coming down—there had been a lot of bayonet fighting, and a lot of killing. The wounded are getting back already, most of them with machine-gun wounds, the worst of them with shell wounds. The New-Zealanders had hardly gone over before German flares rose to call on the guns. The guns did not answer for some little while; but instantly there was the chattering fire of many machine-guns; and from places above the Ypres—Roulers railway, and all the length of the Goudberg spur of the Passchendaele, where there were many

blockhouses and concrete streets, there was poured out a sweeping barrage of bullets.

Our men, advancing on all sides of the Passchendaele Ridge and right up to the edge of Houthulst Forest, were everywhere checked a while by the swampy ground. The streams, or beeks, that intersect this country, like the Lekkerbolerbeek and the Ravelbeck, had lost all kind of bounds, and by the effect of shell-fire had flowed out into wide bogs. Here and there the men crossed more easily, and that led to some parts of the line getting farther forward then others and so to being enfiladed on the right or left. It is on the left that we have had most difficulty, round about Wolfe Copse and Marsh Bottom. On the right it is reported that some of the Anzacs have been seen going up across the slopes of Crest Farm, which is some 500 yards from Passchendaele village, on the heights of the ridge. At the present time it is impossible to tell more about this battle than to say it is being fought desperately. Our airmen are unable to bring back exact news owing to the darkness which has again descended, and all that is known so far is that our men are making progress in spite of the deadly machine-gun fire against them, and that they are resolute to go on. The enemy is fighting hard, and his Jaegers, with green bands round their caps, and the men of the 223rd Reserve Division, have not surrendered easily, though many of them are now our prisoners. It is raining again heavily, and the mists have deepened.

XXII

ROUND POELCAPPELLE

October 14

To-day there was a fine spell, though yesterday, after Friday's battle, it was still raining, and looked as if it might rain until next April or March. Our soldiers cursed the weather, cursed it with deep and lurid oaths, cursed it wet and cursed it cold, by day and by night, by duck-boards and mule-tracks, by shell-holes and swamps, by Ravelbeek and Broenbeck and Lekkerbolerbeek. For it was weather which robbed them of victory on Friday and made them suffer the worst miseries of winter warfare, and held them in the mud when they had set their

hearts upon the heights. It was the mud which beat them. Man after man has said that to me on the day of battle and yesterday.

"Fritz couldn't have stopped us," said an Australian boy, warming his hands and body by a brazier after a night in the cold slime, which was still plastered about him. "It was the mud which gave him a life chance."

"It was the mud that did us in," said an officer of the Berkshires, sitting up on a stretcher and speaking wearily. "We got bogged and couldn't keep up with the barrage. That gave the German machine-gunners time to get to work on us. It was their luck."

A young Scottish Borderer, shivering so that his teeth chattered, spoke hoarsely, and there was no warmth in him except the fire in his eyes. "We had a fearful time," he said, "but it was the spate of mud that kept us back, and the Germans took advantage of it."

"Whenever we got near to Fritz he surrendered or ran," said a young sergeant of the East Surreys. "We should have had him beat with solid ground beneath us, but we all got stuck in the bog, and he came out of his blockhouses and machine-gunned us as we tried to get across the shell-holes, all filled like young ponds, and sniped us when we could not drag one leg after the other."

No proof is needed of the valour of our men. It is idle to speak of it, because for three years they have shown the height of human courage in the most damnable and deadly places. But I have known nothing finer in this war than the quality of the talk I have heard among the men who fought all Friday after a night exposure in wild rain, and lay out all that night in water-pools under gun-fire, and came back again yesterday wounded, spent, bloody and muddy, cramped and stiff, cold to the marrow-bones, and tired after the agony of the long trail back across the barren fields. They did not despair because they had not gained all they had hoped to gain. "We'll get it all right next time," said man after man among them. They all stated the reasons for their bad luck.

"If you step off a duck-board you go squelch up to the knees, and handling them big shells is no joke. All that means delay in getting up ammunition." This was from a young soldier who had been flung 50 yards and senseless away from a

group of comrades who were all killed by a big shell-burst. His senses had come back, and a quiet, shrewd judgment of all he had seen and his old faith that our men can win through every time if they have equal chances with the enemy. That faith, that confidence in their own fighting quality, was not dimmed because on Friday they did not go far. The fire of it, the beauty of it, the simplicity of it shone in the eyes of these men, who were racked by aches and shot through with pain, all befouled by the mud, which was in the very pores of their skin, and scared by remembrances of tragic things. To command soldiers like that should be the supreme joy of their officers, and indeed there is not one of our officers who does not think so, and is not proud of them with a pride that is full of comradeship for his good company. Napoleon's Old Guard was not of better stuff than these boys from English farms and factories, Scottish homesteads, Australian and New Zealand sheep-farm runs.

In these recent battles home troops and overseas troops have been mixed together in the mud of battlefields, and they come down together out of the shell-fire to field dressing-stations, waiting to have their wounds dressed and telling their tales of the fighting. There is no difference there between them. They are all figures carved out of the same clay, with faces and hands of the tint of clay, like men risen out of wet graves. A moist steam rises from them as they group round the braziers, and they know each other—Australian and English lad, Scot and Welsh, Irish, New-Zealander—as comrades who have taken the same risks, suffered the same things, escaped from death by the same kind of miracle. They talk in low voices. There is no bragging among them; no wailing; no excited talk. Quietly they tell each other of the things that happened to them and of the things they saw, and it is the naked truth, idle sometimes as truth itself. So when they say, as I heard them say yesterday, "It is all right, it was only the mud that checked us," one knows that this is truth in the hearts of brave men, the truth of the fine faith that is in them.

I told in my last message how the enemy was ready for attack and tried to prevent it, before it started, by violent shelling over our back areas, all through Thursday night, mixing his high explosives with gas-shells and trying to catch our men on the move and our batteries deep in the mud. It is certain that his aeroplanes, flying low through mists, saw great traffic behind

the lines and the work of thousands of men laying down new tracks and getting forward with supplies. That could not be hidden from them. We did not try to hide it, but worked in the daylight under the eyes of their observers in Passchendaele and in Crest Farm below it, and on the high ground above Poelcappelle, so that they could see the tide of all this energy when the gunners, pioneers, engineers, transports drivers, mule leaders, and the long winding columns of troops surged up the arteries of the battlefields and choked them about the Piccadilly Circus of the crater-land.

It was a supreme defiance of the enemy's power, a challenge louder than any herald's trumpet announcing the beginning of a new battle. The enemy accepted the challenge, though not, as we know, with any gladness of heart. Behind his lines there was disorder and dismay, and his organization had been horribly strained by the rapid series of blows which had fallen on him and by his great losses. His local reserves had been flung together anyhow, to meet the pressure we had put upon him. Remnants of battalions were mixed up with other remnants, and our prisoners are from many units. These divisions of his which have withstood the brunt of this recent fighting, like the 195th and the 16th and the 227th, were horribly mauled and broken, and other divisions coming up to relieve them were caught by our long-range guns far back from the lines, and lost their way in the swamps which are on their side of the battlefield as well as on ours, and struggled forward in the darkness and shell-fire to positions hard to find by troops new to this ground. Their High Command issued new orders hurriedly, and made desperate efforts to strengthen their lines. They put up new apron-wire defences around their blockhouses. All the heavy machine-guns of the supporting troops were sent forward to the front lines to reinforce those already in position in their blockhouses and organized shell-holes between the blockhouses and the narrow streets of concrete. Never before did the enemy mass so many machine-guns on his front for continuous barrage over a wide region, and to defend the last spurs of Passchendaele. He had machine-guns up trees as well as on the ground, and he scattered his riflemen among the shell-craters with orders to shoot until they were killed or captured.

It is fair to these men to say that they obeyed their orders and fought on Friday with most fierce courage. It was only here

and there that small bodies of German troops, caught in our barrage and nerve-broken by the long agony of lying in water under a ceaseless shell-fire, ran forward to our men as soon as the first brown lines appeared out of the mud and surrendered. The men behind the machine-guns opened fire at the moment of attack, and it was the noise of this light artillery, the long-drawn swish of its bullets whipping the ground, and a devil's tattoo of groups of machine-guns hidden up the slopes, that broke upon our men as soon as they began to make their way through the mud.

I have already told how many of our men had spent the night. Large bodies of them had lain out since Wednesday. Of these some had been luckier than others. getting hot drink and food and shelter under tarpaulin tents which did not keep them dry, but kept off the full force of the beating rains. Others, not so lucky, had to lie in shell-holes half full, or quite full, of ice-cold water, and rations had gone astray, as many ration parties could not get up through the hostile barrage or were bogged somewhere down below; and for some men at least there was not the usual drop of rum to warm the "cockles of their hearts" and to bring back a little glow of life to their poor numbed limbs. Other men had spent the night in marching, spurred on by the hateful fear of being too late to take their place in the battle-line, so that their comrades would not have their help, but spurred to no quickness because every yard of ground had its obstacle and its ditch, and it was a crawl all the way, with many slips and falls and shouts for help.

It was pitch-dark, and the rain beat against these men, driven by the savage wind, plucking at their capes, buffeting their steel helmets, straining at the straps of their packs, slashing them across the face. Their boots squelched deep in the mud and made a queer, sucking noise as these single files of dark figures went shuffling across along slimy duck-boards, a queer noise which I heard when I went up with some of them on the morning of the battle over duck-board tracks. Some of them lost the duck-boards and went knee-deep into bogs, and waist-deep into shell-holes, and neck-deep into swamps. In spite of all the frightfulness of the night, the coldness, the weariness, and the beastliness of this floundering in mud and shell-fire, they went forward into the battle with grim, set faces, and attacked the places from which the machine-gun fire came

in blasts. The New-Zealanders attacked many blockhouses and strong points immediately in front of their first objective on the left above the Ypres—Roulers railway, and on the way to the marsh bottom and rising slope of the Goudberg spur, where at Bellevue the enemy's machine-guns were thickly clustered.

Below that, by Heine House and Augustus, the Australian troops were trying to work their way forward to the hummock of Crest Farm, barring the way to Passchendaele, and up on the left centre, from the cross-roads and cemetery of Poelcappelle, the Scottish and English battalions—Berkshires, East Surreys, West Kents, and others—assaulted the brewery, which has been captured twice and twice lost, and a row of buildings in heaps of ruin on the Poelcappelle road, which the Germans use as cover for their machine-gunners. Many of these outposts were captured by groups. Our men worked round them and rushed them, in spite of the streams of bullets which pattered around them so that many fell in the first attempts. Here and there the enemy fought fiercely to the last, and fell under the bayonets of our men. Here and there, in the open ground to the right of Poelcappelle and on the ground below Passchendaele, batches of German soldiers made little fight, but came rushing out of their holes with their hands up, terror-stricken.

But machine-gun fire never ceased from the higher ground, from tall masts of branchless trees, from shell-craters beyond the reach of our men. Our barrage travelled ahead, and slow as it was I saw it creeping up the lower slopes of the Passchendaele ridge for the second objective on Friday morning—our men could not keep pace with it. They were stuck in the swamps at Marsh Bottom in the Lekkerbolerbeek below Poelcappelle and in the bogs below Crest Farm. They plunged into these bogs, fiercely cursing them, struggling to get through them to the enemy, but the men could do nothing with their legs held fast in such slime, nothing but shout to comrades to drag them out. While they struggled German snipers shot at them with a cool aim, and the machine-gun bullets of the deadly barrage lashed across the shell-craters.

Australian troops on the right made good and reached the edge of the hummock called Crest Farm. Some of them swarmed up it and fought and killed the garrison there, but beyond was

another knoll with machine-gunners and riflemen, and as our men came up to the top of Crest Farm they were under close and deadly fire. They would have held their ground here if they could have been supported on the left, but the New-Zealanders were having a terrible time in Marsh Bottom and Bellevue, and could not make much headway because of the deadly fire which came down from the spur on which Bellevue is perched. All this time it was raining hard, making the ground worse than before, and the wet mists deepened, preventing all visibility for our machines working with the guns. Orders were given not to continue the second stage of the attack, because the weather was too bad, and the Australians on the right centre withdrew their line in order not to have an exposed flank. In the afternoon the enemy's heavy artillery, which had been very hesitating and uncertain during the first stages of the attack, began to barrage the ground intensely, and continued this fire all the night.

Meanwhile close and fierce fighting was all about Poelcappelle. English and Scottish troops entered the ruins of the village, in spite of the waves of machine-gun bullets which girdled it, drove the Germans out of the brewery buildings for a time, fought their way among the brick-heaps and ruined houses, killed many men who held out there, and with bayonet and rifle defended themselves against counter-attacks which came down the Poelcappelle road. It was as savage and desperate fighting as any episode in this war at close quarters, without mercy on either side, one man's life for another's. Our men were reckless and fierce. They fought in small parties, with or without officers. Ground was gained and lost by yards, and men fought like wild beasts across the broken walls and ditches and shell-craters which go by the name of Poelcappelle. It was five o'clock in the evening that another strong counter-attack by the enemy came down Poelcappelle road and drove in our advanced posts. The brewery then became a sort of No Man's Land—an empty shell between opposing sides. Our men were spent after all that night and day in the mud and all this fighting, and now dusk was creeping down, and it was hard to see who was friend and who was enemy among the figures that crawled about in the slime.

It was the turn for stretcher-bearers, those men who work

behind the fighting-lines and then come to gather up the human wreckage off it. With great heroism they had worked all day under heavy fire, and now went on working without thought of self. They were visible to the enemy, and their Red Cross armlets showed their mission. Away on the slopes of Passchendaele his stretcher-bearers could be seen working too. One body of 200 men came out, waving the Red Cross flag, with stretchers and ambulances, and went gleaning in these harvest-fields, and no shot of ours went over to them. But on our side shots from German snipers were still flying and our stretcher-bearers were hit. Three of them carrying one stretcher were killed, and the officer with them directing this work near Poelcappelle was fired with a flame of anger. He seized a Red Cross flag and made his way very quickly over the shell-holes towards the enemy's position, and standing there, this officer of the R.A.M.C. shouted out a speech which rang high above the noise of gun-fire and all the murmur of the battlefield.

Perhaps what he said was quite incoherent and wild. Perhaps no man who heard him could understand a word of what he said, but there in the shell-holes hidden from him in the mud were listening men with loaded rifles, and they may have raised their heads to look at that single figure with the flag. They understood what he meant. His accusing figure was a message to them. After that there was no deliberate sniping of stretcher-bearers, though they still had to go through shell-fire. It was hard on the wounded that night. The lightly wounded made their way back as best they could, and it was a long way back, and a dark way back over that awful ground. God knows how they managed it, these men with holes in their legs and mangled arms and bloody heads. They do not know.

"I thought I should never get back," said many of them yesterday. "It was bad enough going up, when we were strong and fit. At the end of the journey we could hardly drag our limbs along to get near the enemy. But coming down was worse."

They fell not once but many times, they crawled through the slime and then fell into deep pits of water with slippery sides, so that they could hardly get out. They lay down in the mud and believed they must die, but some spark of vitality kept alive in them, and a great desire for life goaded them to make another effort to go another hundred yards. They cried out

incoherently, and heard other cries around them, but were alone in some mud-track of these battlefields with a great loneliness of the soul. One man told me of his night like that, told me with strange smiling eyes that lightened up the mud mask of his face under a steel hat that was like an earthenware pot on his head. All the time he opened and shut his hands very slowly and carefully, and looked at them as things separate from himself. They had become quite dead and white in the night, and were now getting back to life and touch from the warmth of a brazier over which he crouched.

"I crawled a thousand yards or so," he said, "and thought I was finished. I had no more strength than a baby, and my head was all queer and dizzy-like, so that I had uncommon strange thoughts and saw things that weren't there. The shells kept coming near me, and the noise of them shook inside my head so that it went funny. For a long time while I lay there I thought I had my chums all round me, and that made me feel a kind of comfortable. I thought I could see them lying in the mud all round with just their shoulders showing humped up and the tops of their packs covered in mud. I spoke to them sometimes and said, 'Is that you, Alf?' or 'Come a bit nearer, mate.' It didn't worry me at first because they didn't answer. I thought they were tired. But presently something told me I was all wrong. Those were mud-heaps, not men. Then I felt frightened because I was alone. It was a great, queer kind of fear that got hold of me, and I sat up and then began to crawl again just to get into touch with company, and I went on till daylight came and I saw other men crawling out of shell-holes and some of them walking and holding on to each other. So we got back together."

They came back to the field dressing-stations, where there was warmth for them and hot drinks, and clean bandages for their wounds; and groups of men, who had fought with the same courage, and now, in spite of all they had endured, spoke brave words, and said it was not the enemy that had checked them but only the mud. Their spirit had not been beaten, for no hardships in the world will ever break that.

But while I was talking with these men a figure came and sat on a bench among them speechless, because no one understood his tongue. It was a wounded German prisoner, and I saw from his shoulder-strap that he belonged to the 233rd Regiment of

the 119th Division. Among all these men of ours who spoke with a fine hopefulness of what they would do next time he was hopeless. "We are lost," he said. "My division is ended. My friends are all killed." When asked what his officers thought, he made a queer gesture of derision, with one finger under his nose when he says "Zut." "They think we are 'kaput' too; they only look to the end of the war."

"And when do they think that will come?" He said, "God willing, before the year ends."

In civilian life he was a worker in an ammunition factory at Thuringen, by the Black Forest. He had seen many English there, and never thought he should fight against them one day. His father, who is forty-seven, is in the war. He himself looked a man of that age—old and worn, with a week's beard on his chin; but when I asked him his age he replied, "I am twenty-one. Last night I was twenty-one, when I lay after three days in a shell-hole—['ein granatenloch']—and your men helped me out because I was wounded."

"What do you think of our men?" he was asked, and he said, "They are good. Your artillery is good. It is very bad for us. We are 'kaput.'"

On one side of the fire were the men who think they are winning, whatever checks they may have, and who always attack with that faith in their hearts. On the other side was the man who said "We are finished," and sat huddled up in despair. All of them had suffered the same things.

To-day the sky is clear again, and the pale gold of autumn sunlight lies over the fields, and all the woods behind the lines are clothed in russet foliage. It is two days late, this quiet of the sky, and if Friday had been like this there would have been a flag of ours on the northern heights of Passchendaele Ridge. But still the gunners go on with their toil, those wonderful gunners of ours, who get very little sleep and very little rest and go down for an hour or two into a hole in the earth in those sodden fields where all day long and all night there is the tumult of bombardment. Piles of shells lie on the ground, heaps around them, and behind men are labouring to bring up more; and across the battlefields, strangely close to the actual fighting-line, black trains go steaming along rails which hundreds of men have risked their lives to lay a hundred yards, so that the guns shall be fed and the gunners have no respite.

On the left of the line there is blue among the brown of our armies, and on the morning of the battle I saw French limbers and transport wagons using the same tracks as our own, and heard the rattle of the "soixante-quinze" again below Houthulst Forest, where there are still leaves on the trees and the beauty of a dense yellowing foliage is there beyond all those other woods where there are only fangs and stumps of trees in the fields where our men have fought.

OCTOBER 23

THE fighting yesterday east of Poelcappelle and on the right of the French by Houthulst Forest across the Ypres—Staden railway showed a curious inequality in the strength and determination of the German defence. The French themselves had easy going, swinging up from Jean Bart House across some trench works and through a cluster of blockhouses. The German artillery-fire was slight against them, so that their losses are very few—though they were held a while in the centre by machine-gun fire—and it seems likely that the French gas-shells, fired over the enemy's batteries before the attack, had had a paralysing effect on some of the German gunners. Whatever the cause, there was a strange absence of high explosives, and the line was not thickly held by the men of the 40th Division, who have lately come from Russia. One officer and a score of men were captured, and a number of dead lie about the blockhouses, killed by the French bombardment. The others fled into the forest. Behind them they left two field-guns.

East of Poelcappelle and on the right of our attack the German infantry were also weak in their resistance, and our men of the Norfolk and Essex Regiments who advanced hereabouts did not have much trouble with them at close quarters. What trouble there was came from a machine-gun barrage farther back, which whipped over the shell-craters and whistled about the ears of our assaulting troops. The heavy gunning that we have put over this ground for more than a week, with special concentration on strong points like the ruined brewery outside the scrap-heap village of Poelcappelle and the other blockhouses, had made this area a most unhealthy neighbourhood for German garrisons, and they had withdrawn some of their strength to safer lines, leaving small outposts, with orders to hold out at all costs—orders easy to give and hard to obey in the case of men dejected and shaken by a long course of concussion and fear.

A Bavarian division, the Fifth Bavarian Reserve, had been living in those pill-boxes and shell-holes until two nights ago, and whatever the German equivalent may be of "fed up" they were that to the very neck. Some of our Suffolk and Berkshire boys had taken prisoners among these Bavarians on days and nights before the attack, and these men made no disguise of their disgust at their conditions of life. Like other Bavarians taken elsewhere, they complained that they were being made catspaws of the Prussians, and put into the hottest parts of the line to save Prussian skins. Some of the Bavarian battalions have had an epidemic of desertion to the back areas, in the spirit of "I want to go home." A fortnight ago there was a case of thirteen men who set off for home. A few of them actually reached Nuremberg, and others were arrested at Ghent.

One strange and gruesome sign of trouble behind the German firing-line was found by one of our Cameronians the other day after an advance. It was a German officer bound and shot. Opposite Poelcappelle the German Command thought it well to pull out the 5th Bavarian Reserve and replace them two nights ago by Marines of the 3rd Naval Division, who are stout fellows, whatever their political opinions may be after the recent mutiny at Wilhelmshaven, from which some of them have come. On our left centre yesterday they fought hard and well, with quick counter-attacks, but opposite Poelcappelle they did not resist in the same way and did not come back yesterday to regain the ground taken by our men of the Eastern Counties.

The Norfolk and Essex battalions had to make their way over bad ground. In spite of a spell of dry weather one night of rain had been enough to turn it all to sludge again and to fill and overflow the shell-holes, which had never dried up. The Lekkerbolerbeek has become a marsh waist-deep for men, not so much by rain-storms as by shell-storms which have torn up its banks and slopped its water over the plain. Before the attack yesterday morning our air photographs taken in very low flights showed the sort of ground our men would have to cross. Everywhere the shell-craters show up shinily in the aerial photographs, with their water reflecting the light like silver mirrors. Higher up there are floods about Houthulst Forest extending to the place where the enemy keeps his guns behind the protection of the water, and no lack of rain-filled shell-holes on each side of the Ypres—Staden railway.

Bad going; but our battalions went well, keeping close to their whirlwind barrage of fire and keeping out of the water-pits as best they could, and scrambling up again when they fell over the slimy ground. Manchesters and Lancashire Fusiliers, Cheshires, Gloucesters, and Royal Scots; Northumberland Fusiliers, Suffolks and Norfolks, Essex and Berkshires—how good it is to give those good old names—went forward yesterday morning in the thick white mist, and took all the ground they had been asked to take whether it was hard or easy. It was hardest to take, and hardest to hold, on the right of Houthulst Forest and on the left of the Ypres—Staden railway. Here the enemy held his line in strength, and protected it with a fierce machine-gun barrage and enfilade fire from many batteries which were quick to get into action.

Houthulst Forest, in spite of all the gas that has soaked it, was full of German troops of the 26th Reserve Division, under stern orders to defend it to the death, with another division in support, and the Marines on their right. They had many concrete emplacements in the cover of the forest, from which they were able to get their machine-guns into play, and along the Staden railway there were blockhouses not yet destroyed by our bombardment, which were strongholds from which they were not easily routed. There was hard fighting by the Royal Scots for some huts along the railway, and after holding them they had to withdraw in the face of a heavy counter-attack, which the enemy at once sent down the line. Elsewhere the Manchesters had a similar experience, coming under heavy cross-fire and then meeting the thrust of German storm troops. They and the Lancashire Fusiliers behaved with their usual fine courage, and were slow to give ground at one or two points, where they were forced to draw back two hundred yards or so. The Cheshires and the Gloucesters were severely tried, but the Gloucesters especially held out yesterday in an advanced position, with the most resolute spirit against fierce attacks and great odds, and still hold their ground. At daybreak to-day, after all the exhaustion of yesterday and a cold wet night and heavy fire over them, they met another attack, shattered it, and took twenty prisoners. That is a feat of courage which only men out here who have gone through such a day and night—and there are many thousands of them—can properly understand and admire. It is the courage of men tried to the

last limit of human will-power and sustained by some burning fire of the spirit in their coldness and their weariness. The Northumberland Fusiliers, at another part of the line, and the Cheshires and Lancashire Fusiliers dug in round an old blockhouse, using their rifles to break up the bodies of Germans who tried to force through. At night, or rather at eight o'clock last evening, when it was quite dark, the enemy regained a post, but could do no more than that, and it was a small gain. On the whole the progress made yesterday was good, and considering the state of the ground, still our greatest trouble, was a splendid feat of arms by those men of the old county regiments who are given the honour they deserve by public mention.

The enemy losses were heavy. All last week they were heavy, owing to the ceaseless fire of our guns, and the dead that lie about the ground of this new advance, to a thousand yards in depth, show that his men have suffered.

XXIII

THE CANADIANS COME NORTH

OCTOBER 26

ONCE again our troops, English and Canadians, have attacked in rain and mud and mist. It is the worst of all combinations for attack, and during the last three months, even on the dreadful days in August never to be forgotten by Irish battalions and Scots, they have known that combination of hostile forces not once but many times, when victory more complete than the fortune of war has given us yet, though we have had victories of real greatness, hung upon the moisture in the clouds and the difference between a few hours of sunshine and the next storm.

To-day our men of the 5th Division have again attacked Polderhoek Château, the scene of many fights before, and taken many prisoners from that 400 men of four German companies who were its garrison, holding the high ruins which looked down into swamps through which our men had to wade. They have fought their way to the vicinity of Gheluvelt. This ground is sacred to the memory of the British soldiers who fought and died there three years ago. One of our airmen, flying low through the mist and rain-squalls, is reported to

have seen Germans running out of Gheluvelt Château, a huddle of broken walls now after this three years' war, and escaping down the Menin road. Nothing is very definite as I write from that part of the line, as nothing can be seen through the darkness of the storm and few messages come back out of the mud and mist.

Northwards the Canadians have taken many "pill-boxes" and an uncounted number of prisoners—not easily, not without tragic difficulties to overcome in the valleys of those miserable becks, which have been spilt into swamps, and up the slopes of the Passchendaele spur, such as Bellevue, with its concrete houses which guard the way to the crest.

North still, beyond Poelcappelle, where the Broenbeck and the Watervlietbeck intermingle their filthy waters below two spurs, which are thrust out from the main ridge like the horns of a bull, south of Houthulst Forest, battalions of the London Regiment with Artists Rifles and Bedfords have attacked the enemy in his stone forts through his machine-gun barrages and have sent back some of their garrisons and struggled forward up the slopes of mud in desperate endeavour. And on the left of us this morning the French made an advance where all advance seemed fantastic except for amphibious animals, through swamps thigh-deep for tall men. This was west of a place falsely named Draeibank, and surrounded by deeper floods, which would have made the most stalwart "Poilus" sink up to their necks, and, with their packs on, drown. It was no good going into that, though on the right edge of the deep waters some French companies waded through and took a blockhouse, with a batch of prisoners and machine-guns.

West of Draeibank there were several blockhouses, but their concrete had been smashed under the French bombardments, and those Germans who had not been killed fled behind the shelter of the waters. Their barrage of gun-fire fell heavily soon after the attack began by the French, but for the most part into the floods which our "Poilu" friends did not try to cross, so that they jeered at these water-spouts ahead of them.

Our troops had a longer way to go and a worse way, and it has been a day of hard fighting in most miserable conditions, Their glory is that they have done these things I have named on such a day. The marvel is to me that they were able to make any kind of attack over such ground as this. In those vast

miles of slime there has been from six o'clock this morning enough human heroism, suffering, and sacrifice to fill an epic poem and the eyes of the world with tears. It is wonderful what these men of ours will do. But in telling their tale they smile a little grimly in remembrance, or say just simply: "It was hell!"

There is more in a battle than fighting. What goes before it to make ready for the hour of attack is as vital, and demands as much, perhaps a little more, courage of soul. Before this battle there was much to be done, and it was hard to do. Guns had to be moved, not far, but moved, and out of one bog into another bog—those monsters of enormous weight, which settle deeply into the slime. To be in time for this morning's barrage, gunners, already worn, craving sleep and silence, dog-weary of mud and noise after weeks and months of great battles, had to work like Trojans divinely inspired to win another day's victory, and they spurred themselves harder than their horses in this endeavour. They were often under shell-fire. Not only the gunners, but all the transport men, all the pioneers and working parties have done their utmost. Battalions of fighting men, busy not with their rifles but with shovels and duck-boards, worked in the mud—mud baulking all labour, swallowing up logs, boards, gun-wheels, shells, spades, and the legs of men, the slime and filthy water slopping over all the material of war urgently wanted for this morning's "show." The enemy tried to harass the winding teams of pack-mules staggering forward under a burden of ammunition boxes, rations, every old thing that men want if they must fight. Those mule leaders and transport men do not take a lower place than the infantry who went away to-day, They took as many risks, and squared their jaws to the ordeal of it all like those other men. The fighting troops went marching up or driving up in the rain. Far behind the Front the roads were filled with dense surging traffic, which we out here will always see and hear in our dreams after peace has come, the great never-ending tide of human life going forward or coming back, as one body of men relieve those who have gone before. Rain washed their faces, so that they were red with the smart of it. It slashed down their mackintosh capes and beat a tattoo on their steel helmets. On the tops of London buses, the old black buses which once went pouring up Piccadilly before they came out to these dirty roads of war,

all the steel helmets were tilted sideways as the wind struck aslant the muddy brown men with upturned collars on their way up to the fighting-lines.

But last night was fine. The sky cleared and the stars were very shining. Orion's Belt was studded with bright gems. It was like a night of frost, when the stars have a sharper gleam. Away above the trees there was a flash of gun-fire, red spreading lights, and sudden quick stabs of fire. The guns were getting busy again. "A great night for bombing," said an officer; "and good luck for to-morrow." Our night patrols were already out. In the garden where that officer spoke there was a white milky radiance, so that all the trees seemed insubstantial as in a fairy grove where Titania might lie sleeping. Far off beyond the trees was a white house, and the moonlight lay upon it, and gave it a magic look. Perhaps the work being done inside was the black magic of war, and men may have been bending over maps strangely marked, and full of mystery, unless one knows the code which deals with the winning of battles. "For once we may have luck with the weather," said another officer. About midnight there was a change. Great clouds gathered across the moon. It began to rain gustily, and then settled down to a steady, slogging downpour.

Our luck with the weather went out with the stars, and this morning when our men went away the ground was more hideous than it has ever been this year, and that would seem a wild exaggeration to men who tried to get through Inverness Copse and Glencorse Wood on the wet days of August. They went into swamps everywhere, into the zone of shell-craters newly brimmed with water, and along tracks without duck-boards, where men went ankle-deep, if not knee-deep or waist-deep.

The enemy was expecting them. There seems no doubt of that. An hour or so before the attack he began to barrage the ground in some parts, and in their blockhouses the German machine-gunners got ready to sweep the advancing battalions. Our own barrage thundered out shortly before six from all the guns which had got to their places after the great struggle in the mud. On the right the ground about Polderhoek Château was flooded down in the hollow below that ruin, which is perched up on a rise. Our men of the 5th Division—Devons, Scottish Borderers, Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry—were not far away from it, a few hundred yards, but it was a difficult place to

attack. The enemy had built concrete defences inside and blockhouses on either side of it and in the wood behind. But our men went very gallantly through the morass, in spite of the machine-gun fire that swept over them, and worked on either side of the château, closing round the blockhouse, while from the centre they made a direct attack on the château ruins. In spite of the foul weather, with a high wind blowing and a thick, wet mist, our airmen went out all along the line and flew very low, peering down at our men. One of them reported quite early that our boys were all round Polderhoek Château, hauling out the Huns, while bombing fights were in progress on either side of it. Later messages confirmed this. Sixty prisoners were seen coming back down the Menin road. A wounded German officer said the garrison of the château was 400 men, of four companies. It seems that they must all have been taken or killed, for later it was established that all the blockhouses and the château had been cleared, and our men were fighting beyond Polderhoek Wood.

Farther south there was fighting round about Gheluvelt, by Devons and Staffords of the 7th Division, and an observer reported that he had seen Germans running out of that château down the high road east of it, but it seems that there were a number of dug-outs in Gheluvelt Wood where the garrisons held out after our advance attack had passed, and this was a great menace to our men, so that they may have had to withdraw in order to avoid that trap, or to keep in touch with the troops on their right, who were held up at a couple of redoubts in the morning.

Meanwhile the fiercest battle was being fought by the Canadians near the centre of the attack, up the slopes of Bellevue below Goudberg (which is just west of Passchendaele), where the enemy had long and elaborate defences of concrete, and to the right and left of that from Vienna House, below Crest Farm on the right, to the ground on the left beyond Wolfe Copse. It was from the direction of Peter Pan House and Wolfe Copse that the Canadians succeeded in getting a grasp of the Bellevue slopes, attacking a row of concrete huts in a sunken road which were strongly held by German machine-gunners. The enemy counter-attacked strongly and sharply down the northern end of the spur, and from the direction of Passchendaele, and drove our men for a time down the slopes, though only for a time.

Farther left there was heavy fighting round the pill-boxes. Two of them, Moray House and Varlet House, yielded a score or more of prisoners each, but the ground all about the left of our attack by the Broenbeek and the Watervlietbeek was one great deep marsh, through which the men had the utmost difficulty in struggling.

The German wounded are in a terrible condition, covered in mud and blood, and shaking as men with ague. They are full of despair, and their officers say that Germany is only holding out in the hope of a U-boat victory. The German people, they say, will suffer badly this winter from lack of food. Our own wounded are men who seem to have come out of watery graves, and are plastered from head to foot in a whitish slime. In the field dressing-stations they are as patient as after all these battles, and if in some places they had ill luck they blame the weather for it. No words are too bad for that, but in spite of it our men did wonders to-day.

OCTOBER 28

THE most important position in the attack yesterday was given to the Canadians to carry, and the story of their capture of the Bellevue spur is fine and thrilling as an act of persistent courage by bodies of men struggling against great hardships and under great fire. Nothing that they did at Courcelette and Vimy and round about Lens was finer than the way in which on Friday they fought their way up the Bellevue spur, were beaten back by an intense destructive fire, and then, reorganizing, went back through the wounded and scaled the slope again and drove the German machine-gunners out of their blockhouses.

I have seen those Germans as prisoners of the Canadians. They are men of the 11th Bavarian Division, which includes the 3rd Bavarian Infantry Regiment and two reserve infantry regiments. The other day I wrote about undersized, half-witted fellows who were caught by our men, and said the German man-power must be wearing thin if they sent recruits like this. These Bavarian soldiers are not undersized, but tall, proper men, and stout fellows who fought hard. They carried their mud with a certain swagger, not as men who had surrendered easily, and were not utterly dejected, like so many of our prisoners. They had been picked to hold Bellevue

because of their good moral, and they were full of confidence in their defensive position. They were perched up above the swamps through which our men had to wade to get at them. They had plenty of concrete houses for their shelter, and their machine-guns. The weather was in their favour. They guessed that the British would try to attack them again, but they looked at the floods and rain-clouds, and felt safe, or pretty safe. For some reason of psychology—which is greatly influenced by shell-fire—these men of the 11th Bavarian Division were not mutinous against discipline like other Bavarians, who are cursing the Prussians because of too much fighting, and malingering, and jeering at the officers, or refusing to go into the forward positions, like 800 men of the 99th Reserve Infantry Regiment, who, according to a prisoner, revolted against going into the line at Lens.

"They were all sent to prison," says the man, "and seem to have been very pleased with the change."

A look at a contour map explains the reason why the 11th Bavarians were satisfied with their defensive position at Bellevue, on Goudberg or Meetschecle spur, which strikes out westwards from the main Passchendaele Ridge. The deep gully of the Ravelbeek runs below the slopes on which Bellevue is raised, and down there there is one filthy swamp of mud and water. On the other side of the gully is a hill which rises to Passchendaele, and the separate hummock of Crest Farm, south-east of that high pile of ruin, which commands the long, wide view of the plains beyond. Bellevue on one side and Crest Farm and Passchendaele on the other support each other from attack, and from their blockhouses they are able to sweep machine-gun fire upon any bodies of men advancing up either slope. So the Australians found in the great attack on October 12, when they had to fall back, when Passchendaele itself was almost in their grip, because of the enfilade fire from the ground about Bellevue, while other Australians, trying to work up those slopes on the west side of the Ravelbeek, were terribly scourged by the machine-gun barrage. The Canadians knew all that. They, too, had the black luck of that terrible twelfth of October, when English and New Zealand and Australian troops advanced into bogs, struggled through a sea of mud, and failed to gain a victory, not by lack of valour, for the courage of them all was almost super-

human, or rather human as we know it in this war, but by the sheer impossibility of getting one leg after the other in the slime that covered all this ground.

It was as bad on Friday morning—worse. The rain had poured down all night and the shell-craters brimmed over, and every track was so slippery that men with packs and rifles fell at every few steps. Beyond the duck-board tracks there were no tracks for 1500 yards, and there was a morass knee-deep and sticky, so that men had to haul each other to get unstuck. In the darkness and pouring rain and shell-fire it was hard going—a nightmare of reality worse than a black dream. But the men got to their places and lay in the mud, and hoped they were not seen. As I said in my last message, some of them seem to have been seen by hostile aircraft coming out before the moon went down, and the enemy's guns ravaged the ground searching for them.

The right body of Canadian troops worked up towards Crest Farm along the main Passchendaele Ridge—that is to say, on the right of the Ravelbeek gully. Their ground here was very bad, but nothing like that on the left below Bellevue. They got close to Duck Wood, where there are a few stumps of trees to give a meaning to the name, and on their right other troops pushed forward towards Decline Copse, which protected their flank. Heavy machine-gun fire came at them out of Duck Wood, from shell-craters and "pill-boxes," and the enemy shelled very fiercely all around with high explosives and a great number of whiz-bangs from field-batteries very close to them just below Passchendaele. All the Canadian soldiers speak of these whiz-bangs, directed, after the ground was taken, by low-flying aeroplanes, who signalled with flash-lamps or with a round or two of machine-gun fire when they saw any group of men. The signals were answered rapidly by a flight of the small shells.

But from a tactical point of view, apart from the hardships and perils of the men, the situation on the Canadian right was good. They had their ground, and would have found it easier to hold if all had been well on the other side of the Ravelbeek up by Bellevue. All was not well there at that time. The Canadian troops on the left were having the same tragic adventure as befell the Australians in the same place two weeks before. In trying to work up beyond Peter Pan House they

were caught in the clutch of the mud, and moving slowly behind their barrage came under the fire of many machine-guns worked by those 11th Bavarians from a row of blockhouses along the road running across the crest of the ridge, and from other strong points above and below that line. The Canadian Brigade made most desperate attempts to get as far as those damnable little forts, and small parties of grim, resolute fellows did get a footing on the higher slopes, scrambling and stumbling and falling, with the deadly swish of bullets about them, and those Bavarians waiting for them with their thumbs on the triggers of their weapons behind the walls.

Behind, it was difficult to get news of that heroic Canadian Brigade. Foul mists and smoke lay low over them; no signals or messages came back. An airman, who flew along the line to work in contact with the guns, could see nothing at two thousand feet, nothing when he risked his wings at a thousand feet, nothing still on another journey at half that height. The Canadian rockets were all wet, and no light answered the airman's signals. Ten times he flew along the line, twice at last within two hundred yards of the ground, when he did see the infantry struggling through the enemy's lash of bullets. A bit of shrapnel or shell casing smashed through the airman's engine, and his wings were pierced. He flew in a staggering way on our side of the lines and crashed down and got back with his report.

The next news was not good. It looked like a tragedy. Under the continued fire the Canadian Brigade had to fall back from Bellevue almost to their original line. It was then that officers and men of this Canadian Brigade showed what stuff they were made of—stuff of spirit and of body. Imagine them, these muddy, wet men, with their ranks thinned out by losses up those hellish slopes of Bellevue, and with all their efforts gone to nothing as they gathered together in the mist in the low ground again. It was enough to take the heart out of these men. Strengthened by a small body of Canadian comrades they re-formed and attacked again. That was great and splendid of them. The barrage was brought back and the lines of its shell-fire moved slowly before them again as when they had first started. So they began all over again the struggle through which they had already been, and went out again into its abomination. Even now I do not know how they gained

success where they had failed. I doubt whether they know. The enemy was still up the slopes and on the slopes, still protected in his concrete, and with his machine-guns undamaged. But these Canadians worked their way forward in small packs, and each man among them must have been inspired by a kind of rage to get close to the blockhouses and have done with them. They went through those who had fallen in the first attack, and others fell, but there was enough to close round the concrete forts and put them out of action. The garrisons of these places, thirty in the largest of them, fifteen to twenty in the smaller kind, had been told to hold them until they were killed or captured. They obeyed their orders, but preferred capture when the Canadians swarmed about them and gave them the choice. There were about 400 prisoners brought down from Bellevue, and nearly all of them were taken from the blockhouses on the way up to the crest and from a row of them along the road which goes across the crest.

It was a few hours before the enemy behind launched his counter-attacks, after a heavy shelling of Bellevue, which he now knew was lost to him—a bitter surprise to his regimental and divisional commanders. It is uncertain what delayed his counter-attacks, but the mud had something to do with it, for on the German side as well as on ours there are swamps in which tall men sink to their necks, and bogs in which they are stuck to their knees, so badly that some of our prisoners lost their boots in getting free of this grip.

It was at about four o'clock in the afternoon that the first German column tried to advance upon Bellevue from the northern end of the spur. They were caught in our barrage and shattered. Half an hour later another heavy attack was delivered against the Canadians on the main Passchendaele Ridge, and this was repulsed after close and fierce fighting, in which fifty prisoners were taken by our side.

All through the night, after those vain efforts to get back their ground, the enemy shelled the Canadian positions heavily, but on the left, by Bellevue, the men of that brigade, which had done such heroic things, not only held their ground, but went farther forward to Bellevue cross-roads, where there was another row of blockhouses. They were abandoned by the enemy, who had fled hurriedly, leaving behind their machine-guns and ammunition—eighteen machine-guns on 300 yards of

road, which shows how strongly this position was held by machine-gun defence. Yesterday there were more counter-attacks, but they had no success, and many lie on the ground.

The price of victory for the Canadians was heavy in physical suffering, and unwounded men as well as wounded had to endure agonies of wetness and coldness and thirst and exhaustion. It was only their hardness which enabled them to endure. They lay in cold slime, and a drop of rum would have been elixir vitæ to them. Away behind, carrying parties were stuck in bogs as the fighting men had been stuck. Pack-mules were floundering in shell-craters. Men were rescuing their comrades out of pits and then sinking themselves and crying for help. At ten yards distance no shout was heard because of the roar of gun-fire and the howling of shells and the high wailing of the wind.

"I saw some fellows in front of me," said a wounded lad of the Devons, "and I halloed to them because I wanted company and a bit of help. But they didn't hear all my halloing, and they went faster than I could, and I could not catch up with them because my leg was bad."

"It was water we wanted most," said a young Canadian, "and some of us were four days thirsty in the front line. No blame to anybody. It was the state of the ground."

"I had a poisoned finger," said a young field-gunner, "and my arm swelled up, but I couldn't leave the battery before the show, as they were short-handed."

Sitting round after the battle these men out of the slime, these muddy, bloody men, spoke quietly and soberly about things they had seen and suffered, and the tales they told would freeze the blood of gentle souls who do not know even now, after three years of war, what war means to the fighting men. But as they listened to each other they nodded, as though to say, "Yes, that's how it was," and there was no consciousness among them of extraordinary adventures, and neither self-glory nor self-pity. They had just done their job, as when their wounds heal they will do it again, if fate so wills.

What I have written about the Canadians is true of all English battalions who were fighting on each side of them, and to whom I devoted most of my message on the day of the battle. Those London Territorials, Lancashire troops, Artists Rifles, Bedfords, and the old county regiments of the 5th and

7th Divisions who were fighting around Polderhoek Château and on the way to Gheluvelt had the same sufferings, the same difficulties in bad ground, the same ordeal of shell-fire, machine-gun fire, and German counter-attacks. They showed the same courage, neither more nor less, and although the capture of Bellevue spur was the most important gain of the day, it was only possible because the English battalions on either side kept the enemy hotly engaged, and assaulted his lines of blockhouses with repeated efforts. The fighting of the Artists Rifles and Bedfords of the 63rd Division was typical of all the history of this day in hardship and valour. Even the German officers taken prisoners by them expressed their wonderment and admiration. "Your men are magnificent," they said. "They have achieved the impossible. We did not think any troops could cross such ground." That belief was reasonable. The stream of the Paddebeek had become a wide flood, like all the other beeks in the fighting ground. It seemed unfordable and impassable, and on the other side of it was the old German trench system with machine-gun emplacements. The 63rd plunged in, wading up to their waists, and horribly hampered while machine-gun bullets whipped the surface of the water. There was fierce fighting for Varlet House, a strong block-house, and the Artists and Bedfords, Royal Fusiliers and Shropshires swarmed round it, and finally routed the garrison. Desperate attempts were made against other strong points, and the men of the 63rd Division gained some of them, and captured about 140 prisoners.

Meanwhile on the left of our line, around the flooded areas to the west of Houthulst Forest, the French have made great progress on Friday and Saturday. The Belgians have made a dash too, and there was a gallant episode, not without a gleam of humour, when a small party of Belgian soldiers crossed the marshes in a punt, found the ground deserted by the enemy, and went forward at a hot pace to join up with the French in the freshly captured village of Merckem. The French themselves have cleared a wide tract of marsh-land during these two days' operations, cleared it of men and cleared it of guns, which the enemy had just time to drag away round a spit of land on the edge of the floods. These floods are very deep and broad above Bixschoote and below Dixmude, where the St.-Jansbeek slopes over by Langewaade and swirls round a peninsula of mud.

On Friday the French routed out the German outposts who guarded that mud-bank, several thousands yards in length, and yesterday made a bigger attack above St.-Jansbeek and Draeibank. Before their gallant infantry advanced through these bogs, for it is all a bog, the French gunners were in full orchestra, and played a terrible symphony on the 75's and 120's. Over 160,000 shells were fired by the "soixante-quinze" batteries at the German positions in the marshes and on the west side of Houthulst Forest. Then under cover of this fury of the fire the French infantry advanced in waves. In spite of the ground they went very fast and very far, and spread out in a fan-shaped phalanx between Merckem and Aschoop. Their field-guns are now able to enfilade Houthulst Forest on the western side, and the German guns north of that must be making their escape. It is an important tactical success, which will make Houthulst Forest less tenable by the enemy.

OCTOBER 30.

FOLLOWING up the heroic capture of Bellevue spur, on October 26, the Canadians attacked again this morning on both sides of the Ravelbeek, working up from Bellevue to the top of Meetscheele spur on the left, and gaining Crest Farm on the right, up the main ridge of Passchendaele. If this ground can be held—and the taking is sometimes not so hard as the holding—almost the last heights of the Passchendaele Ridge are within our grasp, and all the desperate fighting of the last three months or more, the great assaults on the ridges by English, Scottish, Irish, Australian, New Zealand, and Canadian troops, through bogs and marshes in the low ground, against concrete blockhouses and great numbers of machine-guns, against masses of the finest German troops fighting every yard of the way, and against incredibly bad luck with the weather, even as far back as August, will have given us the dominating ground in Flanders overlooking the plains beyond.

Crest Farm, on a knoll below the village of Passchendaele, is the outer fort of Passchendaele itself, and its capture exposes the greater fortress under the ragged ruins which stick up like fangs on the skyline of the ridge.

Without Crest Farm Passchendaele was unapproachable, and the capture of this hummock is of historical importance. But in order to take or hold it, as the Australians found, it was

necessary that Bellevue and Meetscheele should also be ours. Both heights were taken this morning by the Canadians.

It was not a great battle in numbers of men, and the longest distance to go was not more than a thousand yards, but it was a hard battle, not won lightly, because of the desperate resistance of the enemy, the difficulty of the ground, the badness of the weather, and the physical hardships endured by the men. The enemy had relieved his troops who met the Canadians' attack on Bellevue on Friday last—the 11th Bavarian Division, who are now said to be on their way to Italy—although I saw one of their non-commissioned officers this morning, taken prisoner a few hours before, after he had been lying in a shell-hole for three days. He knew nothing about his division and nothing about the German thrust in Italy. Nor did he care what had happened over there, but was only glad to be out of the shell-fire with the hope that the war would end soon, somehow and anyhow. His division had apparently been replaced by the 238th, a strong and well-disciplined crowd of men, who knew the value of the Passchendaele Ridge, and fought hard this morning until the Canadians had forced their blockhouse, when the rest of them ran back into Passchendaele.

The German Command probably expected an attack this morning. As usual, yesterday he shelled heavily over the neighbourhood of our tracks and back areas of the battle zone in order to hinder the getting up of supplies, and in the night he sent out his air squadrons to bomb the country about Ypres and try to play hell generally behind our lines. Our airmen were about in the night too. It was the night of the full moon, wonderfully clear and beautiful in this part of Flanders, and many tons of explosives were dropped over enemy dumps and batteries and routes of march. The weatherwise, who have been gloomy souls for some weeks, and no wonder, predicted heavy rain before the night was out; and a rising gale of wind. They were right about the wind. It came howling across the sea and the flats from somewhere in the west of Ireland, but it veered to the east later in the night and the rain held off until after midday. By that time our attack had gone away and gained the ground; and it is in their new positions that the Canadians and other British troops are now suffering the foul storm, with a cold rain slashing upon them. The night was cold for them, and they lay out in shell-

holes, getting numbed and cramped and longing for the first gleam of light, when they could get on the move and do this fighting. It is the waiting which is always worst, and it was waiting under the heavy fire of big shells and shraphel and whiz-bangs and gas-shells and machine-gun bursts scattered over the sodden fields in this wet darkness without aim, but sinister in its blind search for men. The carriers trudged through all this, stubborn in spirit, to get up ammunition and supplies. There was rum for the fighting men, and they thanked God for it, because it gave them a little warmth of body and soul in the cold quarter of an hour before an attack at dawn, when the vitality of men is low.

Some of the Canadians say that the enemy started to barrage before our own artillery gave the signal of attack by combined fire. Five minutes before the start, they say, hostile shell-fire burst over them. Men get this fancy sometimes when there is no truth in it, but it may have been true. They all agree that the German S O S flared up instantly the attack was begun, and that the enemy's gunners answered it without a second's pause. At the same time many machine-guns began their sharp tattoo from the blockhouses on the slopes above and from many hiding-places. In front of the Princess Patricia's Light Infantry there was a number of fanged tree-stumps called by the sylvan name of Friesland Copse. They expected one or two machine-guns there, but found a nest of them. It was a hornets' nest, not easily routed out. The German machine-gunners kept up a steady stream of bullets across their field of fire, and the Princess Pat's suffered in trying to rush the place. Small parties of them assaulted it with grim courage, and when they fell, or took cover in shell-craters, others made their way forward, trying to get round the flanks of the position. It was in that way finally that they made the last close dash upon the emplacements and destroyed them. Some of the German gunners surrendered here, but not many. Hard and fierce was the fighting at close quarters.

The Canadian troops pushed on to Meetscheele village—no village at all, as you may guess, but just a tract of shell-craters and a few mounds of broken brick about a few concrete chambers, with dead bodies of German soldiers lying huddled outside the walls. That is a village in the battlefields. The blockhouses gave trouble, for there were living men inside

with the usual weapon which spat out bullets. So there was another struggle here, very fierce and bloody, and the place was only taken by groups of men who crawled round it in the mud, sprang at it out of shell-craters, and acted with individual cunning and courage. That at least is how some of these men described it this morning, when they came away with wounds. Beyond Meetscheele was another row of blockhouses on a road, and another fight, desperate and exhausting and bloody. But it was from that neighbourhood that the Germans began to run, and when they were seen running the Canadians knew that the objectives had been won. All that was on the left of the Ravelbeek stream, which is a No Man's Land of slime between the slopes.

On the right, which is the main Passchendaele Ridge, another Canadian Brigade was fighting up to Crest Farm. They, too, had to assault some "pill-boxes" and had to fight hard for their ground, but they captured Crest Farm and the farmer's boys, who were stalwart young Germans, and a number of machines with which they plough the fields for the harvest of death. These machine-guns and their ammunition store were used against the enemy by the Canadians, and helped to smash up the counter-attacks, which assaulted the new positions very quickly after their capture. On the extreme right of the Canadians the enemy opened a very heavy bombardment from the Keifburg spur, and it was so violent that special artillery action was called for, and a number of Australian heavies took measures to silence these guns. The first counter-attack developed at about eight o'clock, from the direction of Mosselmarkt, but this was dealt with by our guns, and did not reach the Canadian lines. Our airmen, flying in the gale, reported groups of men retreating in a disorderly way, and the German stretcher-bearers were busy. At about 9.30 hostile infantry in extended order were seen advancing towards the front, and our guns again got busy. Meanwhile the Artists, Bedfords, Royal Fusiliers, and Shropshires of the 63rd Division, and London men of the 58th Division were fighting in the low swampy ground to the north of the Canadians. They have had a very hard time on both sides of the Paddebeek and in other swamps, where little isolated garrisons of the enemy hold their "pill-boxes" in a girdle of the machine-gun fire. The rain is now heavy, and a thick, dank mist lies over the

fields, and what was bad ground is now worse ground. There is no aeroplane observation this afternoon, and the Canadians, who are holding the captured positions, can no longer be seen by the hostile air squadrons. This morning they flew very low over the infantry in places, dropping bombs and firing their machine-guns at groups of men. The battle is one of those called "a minor operation," but the ground taken by heroic effort is the gateway to Passchendaele.

XXIV

LONDON MEN AND ARTISTS

OCTOBER 31

WE still hold the high ground about Crest Farm and the Meetscheele Spur, from which Passchendaele is only 400 or 500 yards distant, and the Canadians have consolidated their positions there, and with the help of the guns have beaten off the enemy's counter-attacks. Up there the ground is dry, and the Canadian soldiers are on sandy soil above the hideous swamps of the valleys and beeks. The enemy's batteries are shelling our new lines with intense fire, and are attempting as usual to harass our tracks and artillery. To-day, after the battle, the weather is clear and beautiful again, as it was on the day after the last battle—a tragic irony which makes our men rather bitter with their luck—and in the sunshine and fleecy clouds there are many hostile aeroplanes overhead and many air combats between their fighting-planes and ours. I saw the beginning of one over Ypres this morning before the chase of the enemy machine passed out of sight with a burst of machine-gun fire, and all through the morning our anti-aircraft guns were busy flinging white shrapnel at these birds, who came with prying eyes over our camps, their wings all shining in the sunlight and looking no bigger than butterflies at the height they flew. Yesterday, during the battle, it was almost impossible to fly, owing to the strength of the gale, and impossible to see unless a pilot almost brushed the earth with his wings. One of our airmen did fly as low as that, as I have told, and went ten times on his business up and down the Canadian lines. But elsewhere, above the dreadful swamps of the Paddebeek and the Lekkerbolerbeek, the airmen had an almost hopeless task.

It was partly owing to this that it was very difficult to get any news of the London Territorials of the 58th Division and the Artists, Bedfords, and others of the 63rd who went away at the same time as the Canadians in the low ground instead of on high ground. Even their battalion commanders, not far behind, could see nothing of the men when the attack had started, and could get no exact knowledge of them for many hours. The wounded came back to give vague hints of what was happening, but as a rule wounded men know nothing more than their own adventures in their own track of shell-craters. Some of them have never come back. No man knows yet what has become of them out there. Little groups may still be holding on to advanced posts out there in the swamps.

It is idle for me to try to describe this ground again, the ground over which the London men and the Artists had to attack. Nothing that I can write will convey remotely the look of such ground and the horror of it. Unless one has seen vast fields of barren earth, blasted for miles by shell-fire, pitted by deep craters so close that they are like holes in a sieve, and so deep that the tallest men can drown in them when they are filled with water, as they are now filled, imagination cannot conceive the picture of this slough of despond into which our modern Christians plunge with packs on their backs and faith in their hearts to face dragons of fire a thousand times more frightful than those encountered in the "Pilgrim's Progress." The shell-craters yesterday were overbrimmed with water, and along the way of the becks, flung out of bounds by great gun-fire, these were not ponds and pools, but broad deep lakes in which the litter and corruption of the battlefield floated.

The London Territorials had in front of them a number of blockhouses held by the enemy's machine-gunners on each side of the road which runs from Poelcappelle to Spriet. Far out in front of their line was a place called Whitechapel—a curious coincidence that Londoners should attack in its neighbourhood—and nearer to them, scattered about in enfilade positions, were other "pill-boxes." On hard ground in decent weather these places could have been assaulted and—if courage counts, as it does—taken by these splendid London lads of ours, whose spirit was high before the battle, and who have proved their quality, not only before in this Flanders battle, but also at Bullecourt and other places in the line. But yesterday luck was dead

against them. Archangels would have needed their wings to get across such ground, and the London men had no divine help help in that way, and had to wade and haul out one leg after the other from this deep sucking bog, and could hardly do that. Hundreds of them were held in the bog as though in glue, and sank above their waists. Our artillery barrage, which was very heavy and wide, moved forward at a slow crawling pace, but it could not easily be followed. It took many men an hour and a half to come back a hundred and fifty yards. A rescue party led by a sergeant-major could not haul out men breast high in the bog until they had surrounded them with duck-boards and fastened ropes to them. Our barrage went ahead and the enemy's barrage came down, and from the German blockhouses came a chattering fire of machine-guns, and in the great stretch of swamp the London men struggled.

And not far away from them, but invisible in their own trouble among the pits, the Artists Rifles, Bedfords, and Shropshires were trying to get forward to other blockhouses on the way to the rising ground beyond the Paddebeek. The Artists and their comrades were more severely tried by shell-fire than the Londoners. No doubt the enemy had been standing at his guns through the night, ready to fire at the first streak of dawn, which might bring an English attack, or the first rocket as a call to them from the garrisons of the blockhouses. A light went up, and instantly there roared out a great sweep of fire from heavy batteries and field-guns; 4·2's and 5·9's fell densely and in depth, and this bombardment did not slacken for hours. It was a tragic time for our valiant men, struggling in the slime with their feet dragged down. They suffered, but did not retreat. No man fell back, but either fell under the shell-fire or went on. Some groups of London lads were seen going over a little rise in the ground far ahead, but no more has been heard of them. Some of them got as far as the blockhouses, assaulted them without any protective fire from our artillery, because the barrage was ahead, and captured them. By this wonderful courage in the worst and foulest conditions that may be known by fighting men they took Noble's Farm and Tracas Farm.

It was by this latter farm that an heroic act was done by a young London lieutenant—one of those boys of ours who heard the call to the colours and went quickly round to the nearest recruiting office, not knowing what war was, but eager to offer

his youth. He knew the full meaning of war yesterday by the concrete blockhouse on the Tracas road. He had a group of men with him, his own men from his own platoon, and he asked them to stick it out with him. They stuck it out until all were killed or wounded, and the last of them still standing was this lieutenant. I do not know if even he was standing at the end, for he had been wounded. He had been wounded not once only, but eight times, and still he asked his men to stick it out with him, and at last fell among them, and so was picked up by the stretcher-bearers when they came searching round this place under heavy fire, and found all the men lying there.

There was a queer kind of road going nowhere and coming from nowhere east of Papa House. For some time before the battle Germans were seen coming out of it, remarkably clean, and not like men who have been living in mud-holes. It is a concrete street tunnelled and apertured for machine-guns, and bullets poured from it yesterday, and the London lads had a hard time in front of it. The London Regiment and the Royal Fusiliers who fought this battle, and not far from them were the Artists Rifles—the dear old "Artists" who in the old Volunteer days looked so dandy in their grey and silver across the lawns of Wimbledon. They suffered yesterday in hellish fire, and made heavy sacrifices to prove their quality. It was a fight against the elements, in league with the German explosives, and it was a frightful combination for the boys of London and the clean-shaven fellows of the Naval Brigade, who looked so splendid on the roads before they went into this mud. They did not gain all their objectives yesterday, but what glory there is in human courage in the most fiery ordeal they gained eternally.

The gunners were great too. They were in the mud like the infantry in some places. They were heavily shelled, and the transport men and gun-layers and gunner officers had to get a barrage down when it was difficult to stand steady in the bogs. They have done this not for one day and night but for many days and nights, and the strain upon them has been nerve-racking. After the last battle, when the Londoners were relieved and marched down past the guns, they cheered those gunners who had answered their signals and given them great bombardment and worked under heavy fire. I think the cheers

of those mud- and blood-stained men to the London gunners ring out in an heroic way above the noise and tragedy of battle.

XXV

THE CAPTURE OF PASSCHENDAELE

NOVEMBER 6

IT is with thankfulness that one can record to-day the capture of Passchendaele, the crown and crest of the ridge which made a great barrier round the salient of Ypres and hemmed us in the flats and swamps. After an heroic attack by the Canadians this morning they fought their way over the ruins of Passchendaele and into ground beyond it. If their gains be held the seal is set upon the most terrific achievement of war ever attempted and carried through by British arms.

Only we out here who have known the full and intimate details of that fighting, the valour and the sacrifice which have carried our waves of men up those slopes, starting at Messines and Wyschaete at the lower end of the range in June last, crossing the Pilkem Ridge in the north, and then storming the central heights from Westhoek to Polygon Wood through Inverness Copse and Glencorse Wood, from Zonnebeke to Broodseinde, from the Gavenstafel to Abraham Heights, from Langemarck to Poelcappelle, can understand the meaning of to-day's battle and the thrill at the heart which has come to all of us to-day because of the victory. For at and around Passchendaele is the highest ground on the ridge, looking down across the sweep of the plains into which the enemy has been thrust, where he has his camps and his dumps, where from this time hence, if we are able to keep the place, we shall see all his roads winding like tapes below us and his men marching up them like ants, and the flash and fire of his guns and all the secrets of his life, as for three years he looked down on us and gave us hell.

What is Passchendaele? As I saw it this morning through the smoke of gun-fire and a wet mist it was less than I had seen before, a week or two ago, with just one ruin there—the ruin of its church—a black mass of slaughtered masonry and nothing else, not a house left standing, not a huddle of brick on that shell-swept height. But because of its position as the crown of the ridge that crest has seemed to many men like a prize for

which all these battles of Flanders have been fought, and to get to this place and the slopes and ridges on the way to it, not only for its own sake but for what it would bring with it, great numbers of our most gallant men have given their blood, and thousands—scores of thousands—of British soldiers of our own home stock and from overseas have gone through fire and water, the fire of frightful bombardments, the water of the swamps, of the beeks and shell-holes, in which they have plunged and waded and stuck and sometimes drowned. To defend this ridge and Passchendaele, the crest of it, the enemy has massed great numbers of guns and incredible numbers of machine-guns and many of his finest divisions. To check our progress he devised new systems of defence and built his concrete blockhouses in echelon formation, and at every cross-road, and in every bit of village or farmstead, and our men had to attack that chain of forts through its girdles of machine-gun fire, and, after a great price of life, mastered it. The weather fought for the enemy again and again on the days of our attacks, and the horrors of the mud and bogs in this great desolation of crater-land miles deep—eight miles deep—over a wide sweep of country, belongs to the grimmest remembrances of every soldier who has fought in this battle of Flanders. The enemy may brush aside our capture of Passchendaele as the taking of a mud-patch, but to resist it he has at one time or another put nearly a hundred divisions into the arena of blood, and the defence has cost him a vast sum of loss in dead and wounded. I saw his dead in Inverness Copse and Glencorse Wood, and over all this ground where the young manhood of Germany lies black and in corruption. It was not for worthless ground that so many of them died and suffered great agonies, and fought desperately and came back again and again in massed counter-attacks, swept to pieces by our guns and our rifle-fire. Passchendaele is but a pinprick on a fair-sized map, but so that we should not take it the enemy had spent much of his man-power and his gun-power without stint, and there have flowed up to his guns tides of shells almost as great as the tides that flowed up to our guns, and throughout these months he has never ceased, by day or night, to pour out hurricanes of fire over all these fields, in the hope of smashing up our progress. A few days ago orders were issued to his troops. They were given in the name of Hindenburg. Passchendaele must be held at all costs, and, if lost, must be recaptured at all costs.

Passchendaele has been lost to the enemy to-day, and if we have any fortune in war, it will not be retaken.

The Canadians have had more luck than the English, New Zealand and Australian troops who fought the battles on the way up with most heroic endeavour, and not a man in the Army will begrudge them the honour which they have gained, not easily, not without the usual price of victory, which is some men's death and many men's pain. For several days the enemy has endeavoured to thrust us back from the positions held round Crest Farm and on the left beyond the Paddebeck, where all the ground is a morass. The Artists and Bedfords who fought there on the left on the last days of last month had a very hard and tragic time, but it was their grim stoicism in holding on to exposed outposts—small groups of men under great shell-fire—which enabled the Canadians this morning to attack from a good position. A special tribute is due to two companies of Shropshires who, with Canadian guides, worked through a woodland plantation, drove a wedge into enemy territory, and held it against all attempts to dislodge them.

Heavy German counter-attacks were made during the past few days to drive us off Crest Farm and the Meetscheele spur, but they only made a slight lodgment near Crest Farm and were thrust back with great loss to themselves. Meanwhile there was the usual vast activity on our side in making tracks and carrying railroads a few hundred yards nearer, and hauling forward heavy guns out of the slough in which they were deeply sunk, and carrying up stores of ammunition and supplies for men and guns, and all this work by pioneers and engineers and transport men and infantry was done under infernal fire and in deep mud and filth. Last night the enemy increased his fire as though he guessed his time was at hand, and all night he flung down harassing barrages and scattered shells from his heavies and used gas-shells to search and dope our batteries, and tried hard by every devilish thing in war to prevent the assembly of troops. The Canadians assembled—lying out in shell-craters and in the deep slime of the mud, and under this fire, and though there were anxious hours and a great strain upon officers and men, and many casualties, the spirit of the men was not broken, and in a wonderful way they escaped great losses. It was a moist, soft night, with a stiff wind blowing. The weather prophets in the evening had shaken their heads gloomily and said, "It will rain, beyond all doubt." But luck was with our

troops for once, and the sun rose in a clear sky. There was a great beauty in the sky at daybreak, and I thought of the sun of Austerlitz and hoped it might presage victory for our men to-day. Beneath the banks of clouds, all dove-grey, like the wings of birds, the sun rose in a lake of gold, and all the edges of the clouds were wonderfully gleaming. The woods in their russet foliage were touched with ruddy fires, so that every crinkled leaf was a little flame. The leaves were being caught up by the wind and torn from their twigs and scattered across the fields, and the wet ditches were deep with leaves that had fallen and reddened in last week's rain. But it was the light of the dawn that gave a strange spiritual value to every scene on the way to the battle-field, putting a glamour upon the walls of broken houses and shining mistily in the pools of the Yser Canal and upon its mud-banks, and the strange little earth dwellings which our men once used to inhabit along its line of dead trees, with their trunks wet and bright. When I went up over the old battle-fields this glory gradually faded out of the sky, and the clouds gathered and darkened in heavy grey masses and there was a wet smell in the wind which told one that the prophets were not wrong about the coming of rain. But the duck-boards were still dry and it made walking easier, though any false step would drop one into a shell-crater filled to the brim with water of vivid metallic colours, or into broad stretching bogs churned up by recent shell-fire and churned again by shells that came over now, bursting with a loud roar after their long high scream, and flinging up waterspouts after their pitch into the mud. The German long-range guns were scattering shells about with blind eyes, doing guesswork as to the whereabouts of our batteries, or firing from aeroplane photographs to tape out the windings of our duck-board tracks and the long straight roads of our railway lines. For miles along and around the same track where I walked, single files of men were plodding along, their grey figures silhouetted where they tramped on the skyline, with capes blowing and steel hats shining. Every minute a big shell burst near one of these files, and it seemed as if some men must have been wiped out, but always when the smoke cleared the line was closed up and did not halt on its way. The wind was blowing, but all this grey sky overhead was threaded through with aeroplanes—our birds going out to the battle. They flew high, in flights of six, or singly at a swift

pace, and beneath their planes our shells were in flight from heavy howitzers and long-muzzled guns whose fire swept one with blasts of air and smashed against one's ears. Out of the wild wide waste of these battlefields with their dead tree-stumps and their old upheaved trenches, and litter of battle, and endless craters out of which the muddy water slopped, there rose a queer big beast, monstrous and ungainly as a mammoth in the beginning of the world's slime. It was one of our "sausage" balloons getting up for the morning's work. Its big air-pockets flapped like ears, and as it rose its body heaved and swelled.

It was beyond the line of German "pill-boxes" captured in the fighting on the way to the Steenbeek, and now all flooded and stinking in its concrete rooms, that I saw Passchendaele this morning. The long ridge to which the village gives its name curved round black and grim below the clouds, right round to Polygon Wood and the heights of Broodseinde, a long formidable barrier, a great rampart against which during these four months of fighting our men flung themselves, until by massed courage, in which individual deeds are swallowed up so that the world will never know what each man did, they gained those rolling slopes and the hummocks on them and the valleys in between, and all their hidden forts. Below the ridge all our field-guns were firing, and the light of their flashes ran up and down like Jack o' Lanterns with flaming torches. Far behind me were our heavy guns, and their shells travelled overhead with a great beating of the wind. In the sky around was the savage whine of German shells, and all below the Passchendaele Ridge monstrous shells were flinging up masses of earth and water, and now and then fires were lighted and blazed and then went out in wet smoke.

The Canadians had been fighting in and beyond Passchendaele. They had been fighting around the village of Mosselmarkt, on the Goudberg spur. It was reported they had carried all their objectives and were consolidating their defences for the counter-attacks which were sure to come. The enemy had put a new division into the line before our attack, a division up from the Champagne, and, judging from the prisoners taken to-day, a smart, strong, and well-disciplined crowd of men. But they did not fight much as soon as the Canadians were close up on them. The Canadian fighting was chiefly through shell-fire which came down heavily a minute or so after our drum-fire began, and against machine-gun fire which came out of the

blockhouses in and around Passchendaele, from the cellars there, and other cellars at Mosselmarkt.

The Canadians on the right were first to get to Passchendaele Church. Wounded men say they saw the Germans running away as they worked round the church. On the left the Canadians had farther to go, but wave after wave of them closed in and got into touch with their right wing. The enemy's machine-gun fire was very severe, especially from a long-range barrage, but there was little hand-to-hand fighting in Passchendaele, and the men who did not escape surrendered and begged for mercy. Up to the time I write I have no knowledge of any counter-attack, but it was reported quite early in the morning that there were masses of Germans packed into shell-holes on the right of the village, and others have been seen assembling on the roads to the north of Passchendaele. The Canadians believe they will hold their gains. If they do, their victory will be a fine climax to these long battles in Flanders, which have virtually given us the great ridge, all but some outlying spurs of it, and the command of the plains beyond.

NOVEMBER 7

HINDENBURG'S command that Passchendaele must be held at all costs, or if lost retaken at all costs, has not so far been fulfilled by the Eleventh Prussian Division which garrisoned the crest of the great ridge. Passchendaele and the high ground about it is firmly ours, and as yet there have been only a few feeble attempts at counter-attacks by the enemy. Why there was no strong and well-organized counter-attack is a mystery to the German officers and men taken prisoner by us, and especially to two battalion commanders whom I saw marching down to-day behind our lines at the head of a small party of Prussian soldiers.

One of the German colonels was the commander of the support battalion. He had apparently come up to Passchendaele the night before to confer with the commander of the front line. Now from six o'clock yesterday morning until four o'clock in the afternoon he sat, with his brother-officer and four or five men, in that little stone house which was already their prison and might be their tomb. For some queer reason this pill-box of theirs, or dose-box as the Canadians call it, was overlooked by the assaulting troops. As no machine-gun fire came from it, it was passed by, perhaps as an empty house, and the moppers-up did not trouble about it. The commander of the support line,

a tall, bearded man, very handsome and soldierly as I saw him to-day, urged the other commanding officer, a younger, weaker-looking man, to stay quiet and await the counter-attack. "Our men are sure to come," he said, "and then we shall be rescued."

But hour after hour passed following the British attack at dawn, and there was no sign of advancing Germans or of retreating Canadians. Imagine the nervous strain of those two men, and of the soldiers who sat watching them and listening to their conversation, as it could be heard through the crashing of shells outside. At four o'clock neither of these battalion commanders could endure the situation longer.

"If we stay here they will kill us when they find us," said the tall, bearded man. "It is better to give ourselves up now," they decided. So they have told their own story, and at four o'clock they went outside and crossed a few yards of ground, until they were seen by some of the Canadians, and raised their hands as a sign of surrender.

It may have been that the absence of the commander of the support line was the reason for the poor effort made to counter-attack yesterday after the Canadian assault had swept through Passchendaele and on the right and on the left had fought along the crest of the Goudberg spur, through Meetscheele and Mosselmarkt. I think there must have been other reasons, but whether or no it is certain that no big attack developed. Groups of men were seen assembling yesterday at various places to the north of Passchendaele, but these were scattered by our gun-fire. Other groups were seen to the north of Mosselmarkt on the left, but these were also broken up and did not draw near. One officer tried to get up with his men, but when he saw there was no support, and that our shell-fire was heavy, he retired, and a few of his men were taken prisoners. After fierce gun-fire yesterday afternoon all along the crest of the ridge, the enemy's bombardment slackened off, and the night was quieter than the Canadians had expected, though Passchendaele and its neighbourhood could not be called a really quiet spot.

I have told already in my message yesterday the general outline of the Canadian attack, which has won ground for which so many thousands of our men have been fighting, up the slopes and through the valleys along the spurs, and since the beginning of the battle of Flanders, until only this crown at the northern end of the ridge remained to be dragged from the enemy's grasp. In Passchendaele itself the Prussian garrison

did not fight very stubbornly, but fled, if the men had any chance, as soon as the Canadians were sighted at close quarters. In spite of the severe machine-gun fire the Canadian advance on that right wing was rapid and complete, and they sent back about 230 prisoners from the blockhouses and cellars and shell-craters during the morning. The action was more difficult on the left, up from Meetscheele to Mosselmarkt and Goudberg, a distance of more than a thousand yards, and a farther objective than that of their comrades on the right. The Canadians here on the left were confronted with a difficult problem, owing to the nature of the ground. Below the Goudberg spur on its western side was the horrible swamp into which the Artists, Bedfords, and others had plunged when they made their desperate attack in the last days of October. The enemy had outposts in these marshes at Vine Cottage—a sweet, pitiful name for such a place—and Vanity Farm. For a time they had thrust a wedge into our line here on the left of the Canadians between Source Trench and Source Farm, but, as I have already told, an heroic little attack by English and Canadian troops drove them out before yesterday's battle, and these small groups of men held on grimly under great difficulties, quite isolated in their bog. It was necessary to capture Vine Cottage in order to defend the Canadian left flank in this last attack, and for that purpose a small body of Canadians were sent off the night before last to seize it and hold it, while the main assault of the Canadian left wing, avoiding the swamp altogether there, was to attack along the Goudberg spur. This plan of action was carried out, but not without hard fighting round Vine Cottage in the swamp. All day yesterday there was very little news of that fight, for a long time no news. The headquarters of the brigade was having a hard time under intense shell-fire, and had lost many signallers and runners. The men in the swamp had no communication with the rest of the battle-front, and fought their fight alone and unseen. It was a hard and bloody little action. The German garrison of Vine Cottage fought with great courage and desperately, not making any sign of surrender, and using their machine-guns savagely. By working through the swamp and getting on short rushes to close quarters, the Canadians were able at last to close round this blockhouse and storm it. The survivors of the garrison then surrendered, and they numbered forty men. Meanwhile on the high road of Goudberg the main left wing of the Canadian troops took the ground that was

ence Meetscheele village in their first wave of assault, and afterwards closed round Mosselmarkt. Here in the desert of shell-craters and wreckage there were some concrete cellars and forts, one of them being used as a battalion headquarters and another as a field dressing-station. Over a hundred prisoners were gathered in from this neighbourhood, not in big batches, but scattered about the ground in shell-craters and cellars. Three German field-guns were captured, with other trophies, including stores of ammunition. It will never be known how many prisoners were taken yesterday. Many of them never reached our lines, and never will. They were killed by their own barrage-fire, which swept over all this territory when the enemy knew that he had lost it. Rain fell in the afternoon, and more heavily to-day, in sudden storms which are broken through at times by bursts of sunshine gleaming over all the wet fields, so that there is far visibility until the next storm comes and all the landscape of war is veiled in mist. It is a dreary and tragic landscape, and though I have seen four autumns of war and the long, wet winters of this Flemish country, the misery of it and the squalor of it struck me anew to-day, as though I saw it with fresh eyes. In all this country round Ypres, still the capital of the battlefields, holding in its poor, stricken bones the soul of all this tragedy, and still shelled—yesterday very heavily—by an enemy who even now will not let its dust alone, there is nothing but destruction and the engines of destruction. The trees are smashed, and the ground is littered with broken things, and the earth is ploughed into deep pits and furrows by three years of shell-fire, and it is all oozy and liquid and slimy.

Our Army is like an upturned ant-heap in all this mud, and in the old battle-grounds they have dug themselves in and built little homes for themselves and settled down to a life of industry between one shell-crater and another, and one swamp and another, for the long spell of winter warfare which has now enveloped them, and while they are waiting for another year of war, unless Peace comes with the Spring.

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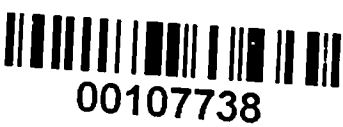
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